Wednesday Walk Report

11/5/2016

House Creek in Clyde Cameron Reserve

Leader Glen Johnson, DELWP

Willow Park Skate Park

Before we enter Clyde Cameron Reserve we gather on the edge of the Skate park. How many of us have ever actually stepped onto that concrete? The kids who use this park are engaging with Willow Park and House Creek after their own fashion – our challenge is to connect with them to develop an appreciation for the environmental aspects of the park.

Pearce St into Clyde Cameron Reserve

After crossing busy Pearce St, Bruce tells us about the 'garden challenge' thrown out to the CCR group by Council to develop a garden beside the bridge as the Friends of Willow Park have done. As the bridge, road and powerlines on Pearce St at this point together form a definite barrier to animals, Glen points out that this would be an ideal place to include some eucalypts to provide launching and landing places for gliders.

Gliders can't glide more than about 40 metres, and need to be able to glide from Eucalypt to Eucalypt. They need height to launch from and a landing place well above ground. Planting trees to ensure there is eventually a mature tree every 25m or so will allow gliders to move along the creek corridor.

Western side of reserve below hospital carpark

The bank at the start of the reserve is almost 100% poplars – a massive bank of woody weed seed, which the Council is gradually addressing. Further along we see the area where poplars have been removed – a massive job!

House Creek riparian zone

As soon as we walk to the creek the work of the Clyde Cameron reserve group is evident, with a continuous zone of mulch right along the creek. This has given the tree and understorey plantings a great start and is providing fantastic habitat for small birds.

One of the first things we notice is the Bracket fungi growing on a tree.

Wikipedia tells me that **Bracket fungi**, or **shelf fungi**, are among the many groups of fungi that comprise the phylum Basidiomycota. Characteristically, they produce shelf- or bracket-shaped or occasionally circular fruiting bodies called **conks** that lie in a close planar grouping of separate or interconnected horizontal rows.

The CCR group work is creating a great demonstration of what can be achieved in the urban creek zone. The contrast between the reserve side and the back yards on the opposite bank is stark: the reserve side featuring managed plantings of native, mostly indigenous plants, with the eastern side featuring largely unmanaged self-sown woody weeds, with some more managed gardens in view. Residential gardens along creeklines are particularly prone to 'escaping' into the damp and fertile riparian zone, but many gardeners do not realise that they might be planting environmental weeds.

Western (Reserve) side

Eastern side

So what is an environmental weed? The 'Bush Invaders' booklet describes them as **"non-indigenous (ie not native to the area) plants that invade bushland"**. Environmental weeds have the ability to spread and create large populations by themselves. They can be Australian native plants (for example Acacia Floribunda in CCR) but by far the majority are from residential gardens or Council parks.

On the Eastern side of the creek we can see many environmental weeds which all usually agree are undesirable, such as privet and blackberry. These are self -seeding, with the seeds spread by foxes and parrots. Then there are those which many people find acceptable like poplars, willows and box elders. These spread by seed and suckers and require not just decisions about **how** to remove them, but education about **why** they should be removed. When individuals own key weed incubation hot spots like creek lines, education is the biggest challenge to biodiversity downstream.

Further up Glen spots two small Black Willow saplings. These should be removed as soon as possible while they are small, and before they reproduce. The Black willow is a terrible invader, a "Weed of National Significance" or WONS. (see Report 4 for further info about WONS). Cut and Paint would be the best method of removal, easily done by hand.

"Cut and Paint" Cut and Paint, or Cut and Paste, is a useful way to remove small to medium sized woody weeds, up to about 10cm thick. Cut the stem as close to the ground as possible, then immediately apply herbicide (50% Roundup) to the cut surface. You can keep the Roundup in a shoe polish applicator bottle and dab it on, or use a paint brush.

Glen points out the good use of gaps in garden beds and placement of park benches to create windows onto the creek and allow access. The CCR group have planted beds of poa and Burgan around the park bench, creating a beautiful place to sit, rest and absorb the 'vision' of the group in restoring the creek. Burgan is not indigenous but is native, a beautiful shrub with masses of flowers and very good in flood prone areas.

As we walk Glen notes the variety of understorey plantings which have established well; varnish wattle, red stemmed wattle, lightwood, melaleuca, blackwood wattle (seeds dispersed by ants), silver wattle (one of the natives which sucker – sugar gliders love the sticky exudate from these), golden wattle (our flower emblem), bursaria spinsoa ('Rattle bush' because of the sound the seed pods make in the breeze). The progress on this side of the creek will be inspiring for those on the other as the differences become more obvious over time.

Establishing through the mulch we find small seedlings of English Ivy and Canary Island date palm *Phoenix canariensis*, both of which are easily removed by hand when caught very young. A regular walk within the mulched beds should easily keep on top of these invaders. Glen warns of the potential of mulch to become a constant maintenance job for volunteers. Much is always "5 minutes from breaking down" and needs to be renewed until native plants can grow enough to provide an alternative ground cover.

Privet is still well established on the steeper banks on this side, and we come across a prime example of the berries so attractive to parrots and foxes. As removal of these plants would expose the banks to erosion, Glen recommends establishing indigenous vegetation along the banks before taking out the weeds.

Closely planted River Bottlebrush on the steep banks would quickly hold the soil, and like the phragmites in the creek bed, the bottlebrush bend and 'go with the flow' in a flood, then stand back upright later.

Glen recommends undertaking woody weed control at 'low tide' – while the creek is low in summer – and before seeding, which is summer/autumn for most plants.

At the southern end of the reserve Glen points out the transitional aspects of this particular spot; where the floodplain meets the southern and eastern slopes of Kent McKoy Reserve and the different vegetation types meet, and where House meets Huon creek. Maintaining connectivity is important here to allow the passage of arboreal mammals in particular.

Please see the following page for a summary of Assets, Threats and Glen's management recommendations.

Thanks everyone!

In Summary: Clyde Cameron Reserve

Assets

- Wide Riparian corridor providing a fantastic recreational and environmental green space in central Wodonga.
- Large remnant trees, older parkland and more recent creek line native plantings
- A framework of large remnant River Red Gum; Silver Wattle; Lightwood Wattle, River Bottlebrush, Red Stem Wattle; Bursaria lasiophylla
- Contiguous creek line of established relatively high quality mulched beds (lacking significant weed threats and therefore manageable/viable into the future
- Engaged / supportive community & council

Threats | Weeds

- Woody Weeds (Black Willow – WONS, Box Elder, Ash, Broom, Canary Island palm, Poplars, Plane Tree)
- Berry based / fox bird spread plants (Privet x3 species, Briar Rose, Prunus, Blackberry, Ivy)
- Non local Weedy Wattles (Acacia floribunda, Cootamundra Wattle)
- Other weeds (Vinca Periwinkle, Ivy, Ornamental grapes)

Management Actions

Planning

- Develop a map based strategic Plan of Action for Parkland – showing core Assets, Threats and Actions proposed and demonstrating the Vision for the reserve.
- Stage works - Focus on maintenance protection and enhancement of existing work zones – consolidate these before expansion,
- Determine what's manageable/ viable based on Community and Council support and resources (volunteers, mulch, chainsaw / cut and paste options, Green Corp, Council crews; level of community / local landholders support etc)

Engage private landholders on south side:

- Circulation / letter drop of pamphlets/ fliers re Bush Invaders; Park Aims and Management Plan; how you (private landholders) can help; Assistance available (incentives, plants, etc); plant lists of preferred and suitable non weedy natives for creek line.
- Gradually increase numbers of residents on board – supportive and active.
- Achieve this by baby steps initially by demonstrating the benefits and outcomes on 'community side of the creek"
- Project opportunity: Gardens for Wildlife, Council Impact Grant – community engagement

General Engagement and Awareness:

- Increase community Awareness - Natives vs Exotics/ Weeds species ID & recognition & Understanding of threat status
- Edge zones: Kikuyu OK with occasional Slashing. Round up edge zones have NO value.

Revegetation

Aim for

- Indigenous trees every 25m for arboreal mammals and suppression of grasses/ weeds.
- Indigenous understorey for food source and habitat
- House Creek = Exotic free zone (Natives only)

Methods

- Take advantage of competition and weed suppression principles - plant near established trees

- Mulched zones OK provided under existing established native tree zones (and out of flood zone) and edged both sides preferably eg track edge.

Priorities

- Stabilize banks with River Bottlebrush
- Riparian zone generally
- Parkland, access track and parkland linkages

Woody / weed control

Methods:

- Hand pulling small plants before difficult to manage (e.g. existing well managed mulch beds)
- Cut and paste slightly larger plants
- Frill & paste or Chainsaw large plants

Approach:

- Follow Bradley Technique - Protection of Best bits First.
- Undertake the majority of weed maintenance and mulching works 'at low tide' i.e. during summer when creek low and bed/bank accessible.
- Use competition principles (Kikuyu vs mulch issues); weed suppression principles
- Staged, long term removal of established Weeping Willow, Poplars (especially large stand near Pearce St end of Murray Valley Private Hospital), Plane Tree
- Map progress
- Green Army CoW potential for Woody Weed cut and paste
- Landmates potential chainsaw crew - use Mulcher for waste via CoW or contract

Priorities:

- Prioritise aggressive invaders (Box elder, privet, poplars, black willow, Canary island palm)

Connectivity

- Huon Creek Hillside connection above bike track (weed control emphasis)
- Pearce Street fragmentation / barrier – include trees in new garden bed.