

Fotpin Update #4

Dear Fotpins

Like preceding updates, this one is to keep you informed of happenings in the group not normally covered by the newsletter. It has been a very busy time since the last update in August, so there's lots to report. This update covers

1. **The Native Grass Restoration Project.**
2. **Committee meetings, our Rules, and the 2011 AGM**
3. **Pinnacle Environment Education Program.**
4. **Extending the Pinnacle Nature Reserve.**
5. **Tracks, trails and horses.**
6. **Fotpin Australia Day BBQ.**
7. **Working with Parks.**
8. **The Weetangera Primary School Fete and future fetes.**
9. **What has the wet spring/summer meant to us?**
10. **Fotpin data and mapping.**
11. **The Chief Minister's Woodland Restoration plan.**
12. **Community service orders.**
13. **Guided walks – monthly and seasonal.**
14. **Brochures and interpretive materials.**
15. **Recording weeding effort**

Best wishes,
Pax
Convenor
January 2011

1. The Native Grass Restoration Project.

This is our flagship project, led by Don Driscoll. It has attracted over \$50,000 funding from three parties: the ACT and Commonwealth Governments, and the Canberra Labor Club. Its outcomes are vital to finding a way of redressing the dominance of exotic groundlayer species across most of the reserve.

The wet spring and summer has delayed fencing, and so the first treatments (sugar application, cereal crop, etc) will now occur in autumn, along with the next plant survey.

I spent several days in the field with Don surveying experimental plots for native and exotic grass, clovers and various herbs – what an eye opener! There were several “eureka” moments – when I could reliably differentiate between species of cupweed, vulpia or clover - and of course the excitement that only comes from (re)discovering a species, and taking a sample for Don to later identify and add to our knowledge base. These are among the fundamentals of knowing the space we're managing.

If you are keen to discover more about the reserve and help implement our flagship project then please factor this into your efforts. For more information see the December newsletter, the project page on our website (www.fotpin.org.au/ngrp/) and/or contact Don (weedmenace@dodo.com.au).

2. Committee meetings, our Rules and the 2011 AGM

The Coordinating Committee has met every 6-8 weeks since its formation in July last year, with the next meetings planned for 21 February and 25 May, and the AGM on 19 June 2011. The priority for these meetings will be to develop our management rules for presentation at the AGM. You can find Committee meeting agendas and minutes on our website - under 'governance' (www.fotpin.org.au/governance.html)

At July's inaugural Special Meeting we agreed to a set of interim Management Rules by which to run our group. The Committee has been considering your input on the interim rules since then, and has recently received more comments from new members. Some of the key points we expect to present to you at the AGM include:

- a) removing any references to membership fees, in line with Rule changes at the Special Meeting;
- b) ensuring members at the AGM can nominate and elect persons to the committee;
- c) retaining references to the Corporations Model Rules to avoid long and complex provisions that we might need for resolving disputes; and
- d) creating a new Committee position of “Coordinator”.

We will seek further input from you after our February meeting, which we’ll work through at the May meeting, and bring to you at the AGM. Please send your comments to Heather and myself at fotpin@optusnet.com.au.

3. Pinnacle Environment Education Program.

At our last Committee meeting Peter Kalyvas and Brian Dobbs spoke to us about their exciting project idea – the Pinnacle Environment Education Program (PEEP). Peter and Brian are former highly experienced primary school teachers, keen to develop an education program showcasing and integrating the Pinnacle and our activities into local school’s learning programs.

Peter and Brian plan to develop PEEP during 2011, for rollout in 2012. The program has support from several local school principals, with a view to it operating seamlessly across the four schools. For more information please contact Heather (fotpin@optusnet.com.au). Peter will be looking for input from fotpins with science, environmental management or other relevant expertise to school curriculum areas with knowledge to help build the learning program. To this end I will be putting Peter and Brian in touch with fotpins.

4. Extending the Pinnacle Nature Reserve.

Several fotpins have suggested that the Bottom Pinnacle should be included in the nature reserve. The Bottom Pinnacle is a broad strip of land extending from the southern tip of the current Pinnacle Reserve down to William Hovell Drive (see the map at www.fotpin.org.au/location.html).

This makes sense given that:

- it’s a substantial parcel of land connecting the Pinnacle NR to lower slopes of the Molonglo Valley through Deep Creek and Kama Nature Reserve;
- it is currently not allocated to any particular use under the ACT’s *Territory Plan*. With the proposed new suburbs in the Molonglo Valley, visitation and potentially damaging use will increase if the Bottom Pinnacle is not dedicated for conservation and managed accordingly;
- Penny and Don have identified high quality grasslands there and in an adjacent paddock in North Kama, and it contains a large number of overstorey species and scope for natural regeneration;
- it’s a realistic use of the land, and would benefit from our restoration and conservation works; and
- we are already doing things down there (grass project, warren mapping, some weeding).

The Committee decided I should write to the Chief Minister proposing the Bottom Pinnacle and an adjacent, smaller paddock in the former North Kama lease be included in the nature reserve. If you’d like to read the letter, you can download it from the ‘advocacy’ page on our website (www.fotpin.org.au/advocacy.html#BP). If our proposal is successful we’ll need to reprioritise our efforts across the larger parcel of land.

5. Tracks, trails and horses.

The extraordinarily wet spring and summer have prevented the Parks Service from addressing some of the management issues at the reserve. They are waiting for the ground to dry before repairing tracks, rehabilitating BMX trails and positioning dead timber to stop trail use. Parks also need dry weather to construct a short length of fencing to prevent equestrians riding west through the reserve from the Springvale Drive cavaletti. For more background information on these issues, see the December newsletter (www.fotpin.org.au/newsletters.html).

As this update was going “to press”, the Chief Minister issued a media release announcing the changes to equestrian access. You can view this media release on the ‘advocacy’ page on our website (www.fotpin.org.au/advocacy.html#equestrians).

6. Fotpin Australia Day BBQ.

This one is for your diary. Please join us on 26 January for weeding at The Pinnacle Nature Reserve in the morning, followed by a BBQ lunch at 68 Southwell St. I expect we'll be grubbing non-saffron thistles and verbascum, as well as possibly bagging verbascum seedpods.

If you can't join us for weeding just come along for lunch and to meet other fotpins. This is a good opportunity for an informal get together and to discuss the previous and next six months. Warren and I can also show you some of the computer-based mapping work we're doing with high resolution topographic data and aerial imagery (see item 10 below).

Please RSVP to me by 22 January. Would be good if you could please bring your drinks and something to be charred on the BBQ, Susan and I will look after salads, bread etc. Information on the program for the day will be kept up to date on "This Week on The Pinnacle" (www.fotpin.org.au/calendar.html)

7. Working with Parks.

Working with the Parks and Conservation Service* has been smooth and productive, on several fronts. I'm pleased to report that Parks:

- consulted constructively with us on revised arrangements for equestrian use;
- responded positively to our calls to revise herbicide use arrangements for parkcare groups. To this end Parks have adjusted their policy to allow trained parkcarers to use an MCPA based herbicide to treat capeweed, horehound and thistles – saving us a lot of time and effort;
- knowing that we were keen to use brushcutters to treat saffron thistles, moved quickly to sort training and OH&S needs in time for slashing. Parks have supplied us personal protective equipment and loaned us two brushcutters during the slashing period;
- has been quick to provide us with spraying equipment and chemicals; and
- keep us advised of contractor spraying to avoid duplicating effort.

Another pleasing development is that Parks are keen to discuss with us reserve access arrangements. I believe there is scope to reduce the length of tracks we currently need to drive on by increasing the number of access points. This would mean more efficient access for transporting our equipment and chemicals, and less driving in the reserve.

Parks annual parkcare newsletter, the Scribbly Gum is available online

http://www.tams.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/211329/Scribbly_Gum7.12.2010FINALlores.pdf

* The former Parks, Conservation and Lands (PCL) has recently been renamed to Parks and Conservation Service (PCS).

8. The Weetangera Primary School Fete and future fetes.

In early November fotpin set up and managed a display at the Weetangera Primary School fete. The display included a series of images and maps highlighting the Reserve's position in the landscape, weed and rabbit control issues and some iconic Pinnacle views. We received positive feedback from the fete coordinator and Weetangera Primary School Principal, and we'll do it again next November. We have been invited to set up a display at the Hawker Primary School fete in March next year, so this activity could become an ongoing fixture in the fotpin calendar.

Thanks to Katy Skinner, Andrew Yates, Don Driscoll and Mark Hallam for attending the display and explaining the reserve and fotpin to our local community. A very special thanks to my Susan for designing and setting up the display, conceiving, designing the kids corner quiz and test running it with our daughter Chelsea, as well as deciding upon and purchasing the prize. We had 72 students complete and submit the quiz, and maybe a few parents read about fotpin as well. The quiz winner was presented with a "backpack full of goodies" (see the December newsletter, www.fotpin.org.au/newsletters.html).

9. What has the wet spring/summer meant to us?

The wet spring and summer has led to an explosion of weeds with, in my view, much larger patches and more extensive germinations of thistles and St Johns Wort. The Saffron Thistles have been up to 2m tall, making slashing into dense thickets a tricky endeavour. Also, the timing of treatments (e.g. spraying, slashing) has been delayed and has meant juggling weeding and working with Don to set up the grass project.

The extraordinarily wet season has meant we've not had the opportunity to progress mapping for the soil and water conservation plan, and that we may not achieve the "reasonable assurance" weed control targets set in the Weed Plan – set against a much drier year, 2009. The upside to the wet season is that if we prevent seed set in this season's weeds then we'll significantly reduce the soil seedbank, and probably weeding effort in future years.

Warren is collating and analyzing weed effort information, in the context of the Weed Plan. This is updated at the beginning of each month on our website (www.fotpin.org.au/weeds/weed_effort.html). I expect several of us keener weeders will compile maps, tables and text to explain the good and the ugly stories coming from the first six months implementing the Weed Plan.

10. Fotpin data and mapping.

You may have noticed fotpin has established some useful mapping capacity. The ACT Government, through its Parks and Conservation Service, has supplied fotpin a range of datasets that we can use for mapping, planning and communication purposes. These datasets include March 2009 satellite imagery, topographical and land parcel (cadastral) information, waterways, and vegetation and vegetation condition data. We are also making use of the excellent high resolution aerial imagery available free for non-commercial use from nearmap (www.nearmap.com.au), which is updated for Canberra every 6 months.

The Molonglo Catchment Group – with a modest contribution from fotpin – has purchased high resolution digital elevation data that fotpin can use for generating 3D images of the reserve and "fly-throughs". These outputs will help us promote the reserve and the things we're doing. We also have GPS and mapping software (Expert GPS and Global Mapper) to turn the above and our field data into mapping products. Warren and I hope to show fotpins some of the things we can do at the fotpin Australia Day BBQ.

11. The Chief Minister's Woodland Restoration plan.

Following an invitation from TAMS, I attended a "roundtable" meeting and discussion on woodland restoration in the ACT on behalf of fotpin. The meeting was chaired by the Chair of the ACT's Natural Resource Management Council, and attended by the Chief Minister, senior TAMS officials, scientists, environment groups, and we were one of four parkcare groups represented (others being Mount Painter, Cooleman Ridge and Mount Majura).

If you are interested in the background paper and a brief submission Committee prepared for distribution at the meeting please go to 'advocacy' on our website (www.fotpin.org.au/advocacy.html#woodlands). The outcome of the meeting is that fotpin is on the working group to develop the plan's implementation strategy and we will seek to integrate that plan with our restoration plans for The Pinnacle Nature Reserve – although it is very early days.

12. Community service order workers.

Probably the greatest barriers to achieving our goals at The Pinnacle Nature Reserve are knowledge about ecosystem restoration, and volunteer time and effort. Fotpin's grass project is a very important initiative that begins to address the first challenge, and we have other ideas waiting for the right time and funding program.

The other challenge, attracting reliable, unpaid field work and effort needs its own innovative approaches, and one possible approach is for fotpin to supervise people ordered by the courts to undertake community service work.

People with CSOs against them – as I understand it – can be required to do up to 250 hours a year of community service. Put in context, the draft Weed Plan estimates some 1,200 hours of annual effort to

effectively control weeds, and whilst this is an estimate, it's likely that several CSOs could achieve a great deal.

Our Committee has agreed to a trial supervision of persons with Community Service Orders, subject to consulting with weeders and fotpins generally. Four fotpins have offered to supervise (including myself) and I'll follow up with the ACT Government in the New Year. At this stage routine weed control will be core CSO activity, and if anyone would like to supervise or co-supervise on a weekday or weekend, for a part or full day, please let me know. The next challenge will be for the ACT Government to find suitable persons to match up with us.

13. Guided walks – monthly and seasonal.

Along with Rosemary Bleming's monthly walks – "Rosie's Walks" – on the third Saturday of each month, we are planning to organise a series of autumn and spring guided walks in 2011. This follows what we consider to be a successful spring walk series in 2010. Please keep an eye out for notice of the walks and if you have any ideas for topics and/or walk leaders please let Heather know (fotpin@optusnet.com.au).

14. Brochures and interpretive materials.

Rosemary Blemings is leading a project to develop a set of seasonal brochures and interpretive materials for the reserve. These will be available at the noticeboard, Pinnacle entry points or from our website and will explain to visitors the seasonal changes that they will see at the reserve, as well as a self-guided walk. These are important communication products for fotpin, and should remain static for several years. If you have any thoughts on their content, or examples of good brochure designs please contact Rosemary or Heather personally or via 'contact us' on our website.

15. Recording weeding effort.

Everyone agrees Warren has done a brilliant job of our website, and for me the ability to log weeding effort is, um, well, inspired! Take a moment to check out this page and the pages to which it is linked, you will be impressed www.fotpin.org.au/weeds/weed_record.html. If you are doing any weeding activity at the reserve, outside of events organised by Bob or myself, could you please record your effort via this webpage. This ensures that we have a complete picture of weeding effort for both reporting and planning purposes. If you have any queries contact myself (fotpin@optusnet.com.au) or Warren (fotpin.web@internode.on.net). I am not aware of any other agencies, parkcare or landcare groups that record and report on what they are doing like this.

As fotpin grows and we take on more environmental management themes and possibly a larger area of land, the ability to record what we do and where we do it, coupled with monitoring of our effectiveness, will be increasingly important for setting priorities, 'budgeting' effort and tracking what it takes to manage this reserve.