

2018 Woorabinda Bushland Reserves Chairperson's report

AGM held on Friday November 9 at the Woorabinda Environment Centre.

I am happy to say that overall, it's been another good year and a relatively busy one for the Woorabinda Bushland Reserves.

One perennial problem is that there is a section of the population who seem to think they have a right to use the reserves as another mountain bike park.

Jane Schoettgen recently saw seven cross-country bikes heading down the Linwood trail. She points out that they have already torn up all the wooden steps and are making the trails unsafe for walking groups, particularly the elderly and families with young children.

It is true that there are no-bikes signs at each entrance, but the symbol is quite small and one of several icons, which I am sure these people never bother to read.

We have already reported a number of incidents like this to the council in the past, to little or no effect.

We need to do more, or the problem will become worse. We do have some ideas, and the issue will be on the agenda for our next regular committee meeting on the 20th of this month. If anyone here has any ideas, we would be happy to hear them.

We do welcome new committee members, and if you are interested you can still nominate this evening. If you don't want to commit to fully joining the committee, remember that any member of the Friends is welcome to attend any of our committee meetings and make suggestions. You won't be able to vote, but you will be able to participate in the wine and nibbles afterwards.

One suggestion I would like to make now is that the new Adelaide Hills Council urgently finds the money to employ more rangers, not just for Woorabinda but the other parks and reserves in the council area. The existing staff are spread far too thinly.

The difficulty is that the value of reserves such as these is hard for the bean counters to measure. They can count the costs, but not the benefits. But those benefits are very real none the less.

How do you put a price on cleaner air, cleaner water, areas of rest and recreation that lower stress levels, improve health and productivity? How do you measure biodiversity in dollars and cents? Parks and reserves enhance surrounding property values and therefore the council's rate income, but how much is that worth per tree?

When you think about it, looking after the reserves properly is a sound economic investment. I hope the new council has a **big** think about it.

On a happier note, our wonderful bands of pest plant persecutors have continued to make steady progress, with two working bees every month – except January. They are steadily protecting the good bush, the bush regenerating after the fire, and they are steadily improving the less pristine areas.

Phil Hicks, who organises the Sunday working bees, reckons his team has put in around 260 hours of unpaid labour this year. Jane Schoettgen's Thursday group contributed a further 203 hours. And these figures don't include the work that some people do on their own.

The working bees have been supplemented this year on occasions by the Mt Lofty Scouts, Bush for Life, Heathfield High School, the Conservation Volunteers Australia and of course the Adelaide Hills Council staff and contractors.

Some of the people who do this work, and the background work that makes it all happen effectively, have been working as volunteers here for nearly 30 years. I'll have a bit more to say about them under any other business at the end of the meeting.

A few of us had the chance to become TV stars in December when Channel Ten's Totally Wild program came hunting for bandicoots in Hender. They didn't see any bandicoots, alas, but the real stars were Jan Walker's grand-daughter Emily Philpott and Bennie Woodrow, a young regular at our working bees, who talked about the importance of bushcare and demonstrated on camera how to tackle weeds and plant tube stock. Some of you may have seen the brief segment when it was aired in April.

In August, Concordia College brought some 60 reception-year kids up from the city to Woorabinda for a day to look for "living things". Given that it was August, it is probably just as well that they include trees as "living things". Jane, bless her, managed to organise some fauna rescue volunteers to come all the way up from Glenelg, with a highly informative power point presentation about koalas, aimed at 5 to 7 year olds. And they brought Goldie, a young koala that had been rescued when very young. All the children were able to give Goldie a pat, and Jane got to give her a big cuddle.

Thanks to our patron, Chris Daniels, our bid for natural heritage status for the reserves was given a bit of a push along when he organised a meeting with the then Minister, Ian Hunter and senior departmental officials last December. The Minister was all in favour, and made it clear to the department that he hoped it would all be signed and sealed by February so that he could have a photo opportunity in Woorabinda to announce it before the election.

That didn't happen, but alas for Minister Hunter, the election did. The Heritage agreement is still not signed and sealed, but it seems it is only a matter of time. Our new local MP, Josh Teague, had a word with the new Environment Minister, David Spiers, and as a result we have a copy of a letter from Spiers, written on August 1, saying should be completed within the next three to six months. Six months is the end of January. So it should not be far off.

As part of the process, Hender will be gazetted from primary use to conservation use. We understand that further down the track, ownership of Hender, which is technically Crown Land, will be transferred to the Adelaide Hills Council, which already manages the area.

Sincere thanks to Josh for ensuring that the matter stays on track, and to the Minister for supporting the idea – particularly at a time when state funding for the environment is under pressure, with yet another round of job cuts under way.

One of Josh's first initiatives on being elected was to organise a forum of environmental groups in the Heysen electorate. Chris Daniels was keynote speaker, and David Ragless gave an excellent talk on behalf of our group.

Josh, by the way, is the presiding member of the Parliament's Natural Resources Committee.

Many thanks again to Josh for his interest in and support for environmental issues.

One disappointment during the year was that we narrowly missed out on a substantial grant under the first round of the Fund My Neighbourhood program. That would have given us \$62,000 for the first stage of the proposed native flora display or bush garden. The new government, alas, axed Fund My Neighbourhood before we could have a second go.

It is still not clear what impact the restructuring and rebranding of the NRM boards will have on areas such as Woorabinda Bushland Reserves. Nor is it obvious what the continuation of the Rau reforms to the planning system will do to conservation efforts, but the reforms have already weakened the role and power of local councils to influence planning decisions.

We live in interesting times.