How Do We Integrate information into a Form Accessible for Land Managers and Researchers?

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Workshop Group

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Points from Plenary Session

The following points, raised during a plenary session, stimulated this workshop topic:

- Who creates the "Big Pitcher"? Does this really help?
- Looking at "nuts and bolts" (see paper by Richard Hobbs, this volume) can help set priorities, but synthesis is required.
- "Big Pitcher" requires an integrated and interdisciplinary approach.
- Problem: management implications of research are very site specific.
- Remove land from production? If so, then re-allocate priorities for land use.
- Integrating information into packages.
- Is there too much information?

INTRODUCTION

Researchers and managers of remnant vegetation in south-western Australia have indicated that the protection and management of remnants must be further improved if the conservation value of remnants is to be maintained and enhanced. Presentations by researchers and managers at this meeting have pointed out that there is a lot of information available on remnants, but this is not necessarily being implemented by managers. Furthermore, remnant managers are not necessarily being supported by appropriate research and information support systems. Poor communication between researchers and managers of remnants was considered a major cause of these problems.

Integration and communication of research information and management needs must be enhanced if problems are to be overcome. The sheer bulk of information on remnants and site specificity of research results compound problems of inadequate communication systems. Furthermore, conservation efforts must also involve an interdisciplinary approach, to achieve better management of remnants. This report summarises a workshop discussion and points emanating from the plenary presentation which specifically addressed these problems and asked the question: "How do we integrate information into a form accessible to land managers and researchers?".

THE "BIG PITCHER"

The synthesis of research information and the development of a unified, cohesive vision for remnant conservation (affectionately termed the "Big Pitcher") were identified by the meeting as integral to maintaining the conservation potential of remnants. The workshop group took the concept of the "Big Pitcher" on board, and at all times discussed the integration and presentation of information for land managers and researchers within the context of a "Big Pitcher".

DEVELOPMENT OF THE "BIG PITCHER"

Development of the "Big Pitcher" was conceptualised as being through a small organisation that would provide a base and framework for the coordination and communication of information between individuals and groups with an interest in remnant conservation. It would also act as a base for the strategic planning for remnant conservation. This would include such aspects as conservation planning, policy development, and the promotion of an improved conservation ethos for remnants which must be instilled in the wider community if remnants are to be conserved in the long term. Hence, the "Big Pitcher" would be operational at both applied and strategic levels.

SPECIFIC ROLES OF THE "BIG PITCHER" AGENCY

Applied Operations

At an applied level, the role of the "Big Pitcher" agency would be to undertake a series of tasks relating to the management of research results, identifying

management needs, and stimulating information transfer and extension. Outlines of some information management tasks follow.

Research

- Synthesise research outcomes.
- Develop the management implications of research outcomes if these have not been done by individual researchers.
- Develop holistic databases and landscape models that can be used and implemented at the on-ground, remnant management level.
- Disseminate synthesised research information to the appropriate land managers.

Management

- Identify the information needs of remnant managers.
- Synthesise management needs into information packages for remnant researchers.
- Disseminate information on management needs to the appropriate research institutions.
- Collate a database of management needs for the "Big Pitcher" management committee to use when considering the future direction of remnant research.

Information Transfer

- Coordinate the design of information packages on remnant conservation. These must be appropriately targeted, presented and packaged for users. Interactive packages with interesting, informative and prescriptive material written in "simple English" were considered key elements in the design of good information packages (for example, *Managing Your Bushland* by B.J.M. Hussey and K.J. Wallace, Department of Conservation and Land Management, Perth, 1993).
- Identify the most receptive and influential group of land managers for receipt of remnant information packages. Children and rural women were perceived as being ideal initial targets.
- Disseminate remnant information to target groups. Such information should include a bibliography of research work done in south-western Australia and a mailing list of persons from the various interest groups and government organisations involved in remnant research and management. For the landowner, dissemination of information would include one-to-one interactions wherever possible. All avenues for information dissemination should be explored (for example, television, radio and audiovisual material).
- Feed the synthesised information that identifies research outcomes and management needs for remnant conservation to the "Big Pitcher" management committee and, thus, facilitate strategic planning for remnant conservation.

Extension

- Develop and coordinate remnant conservation extension programs.
- Employ the skills of specialist extension personnel (for example, have nature conservation officers that operate in parallel to landcare technicians and project officers).

The workshop discussion stressed that information management must involve two-way communication between researchers and remnant managers. While researchers require an avenue for dispersing their research findings, managers must also have an avenue for identifying their research needs.

Strategic Operations

The strategic planning role of the "Big Pitcher" would include identifying conservation objectives, developing remnant conservation policy, and promoting a conservation ethos among the wider community. Some ideas of what this work would involve included:

- developing a vision for remnant conservation in south-western Australia. This would involve defining conservation goals and objectives for the region, as well as developing principles and guidelines for

remnant management. This process would be facilitated by the provision of synthesised information collected by the "Big Pitcher" agency and would also include inputs from the wider community;

- developing the concept that remnant conservation is a land use in its own right;
- promoting the integration of various land uses within the agricultural landscape;
- supporting economic incentives that facilitate landscape and remnant conservation (for example, taxation benefits for nature conservation purposes);
- developing and promoting legal mechanisms for the voluntary protection of remnants in perpetuity;
- providing support to persons with a "bent" for remnant conservation and a positive influence on others;
- identifying the direction of remnant research.

STRUCTURE OF THE "BIG PITCHER" AGENCY

It was considered that the "Big Pitcher" agency should be an autonomous, non-government agency comprising a committee that broadly represents remnant researchers and managers. The committee would be responsible for managing a group of skilled personnel employed to undertake the specialists tasks of the organisation (refer to "Applied Operations" above). The organisation should be located at a site in Western Australia which experiences the problems we are trying to solve.

Other suggestions for an operational format for a "Big Pitcher" agency which were discussed during the workshop or plenary session included:

- creating a remnant conservation section within a current government agency;
- extending the current brief of the Remnant Vegetation Steering Committee;
- expanding the current Save the Bush scheme;
- adopting the Roadside Conservation Committee type model;
- extending the conservation commitment of on-ground land managers (that is, land conservation districts and local government agencies). Discussion of this option highlighted the importance of recognising land ownership as a critical factor influencing adequate remnant conservation;
- adopting a management authority approach (for example, Kings Park Board, Rottnest Island Board);
- adhering to the current situation, with interested persons doing more work on remnant conservation within their individual work environments.

A series of problems with setting up any type of new conservation agency or management authority were identified during the plenary session. The development of a new bureaucracy would require the injection of a large amount of funding, which could prove difficult to obtain. It may also pose a threat to current conservation agencies and land managers, and would probably prove a politically sensitive issue with which to deal. Furthermore, assuming that an organisation such as that proposed would be affiliated with at least one government authority as a consequence of funding arrangements and the need for organisation credibility, it would be virtually impossible for the "Big Pitcher" agency to remain completely autonomous and not be committed in some way to the expectations of its supervising authority. A better approach to attaining an integrated and accessible information transfer system may be to facilitate the networking process that is currently in place. However, given the constant reminder that there are a series of problems working against remnant conservation, there seems to be a trend for a more integrated, interdisciplinary approach to conservation planning developing.

REMNANT NATIVE VEGETATION
TEN YEARS ON

A DECADE OF RESEARCH
AND MANAGEMENT

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