



The Department of Environment and Conservation Volunteer Strategy 2011 – 2016

Purpose

This document outlines the strategic direction for volunteering programs supporting the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) for the period 2011 – 2016. It sets out implementation plans for each strategy and includes supporting information at Attachment 1 to provide context and acknowledgement of the enormous contribution volunteers make to the environment and conservation in Western Australia.

The strategy embraces the broad variety of volunteer programs across a number of DEC divisions, including Parks and Visitor Services, Nature Conservation, Regional Services and Science, and those managed by the Keep Australia Beautiful Council.

Volunteers are a valued and integral component of the Western Australian community. In the contemporary context, volunteering enriches the community through the delivery of environmental, social, economic and health benefits to individuals, local groups and communities, the state and the nation.

Volunteers are highly valued by DEC because they build communication links and understanding between DEC and the community and contribute valuable skills and knowledge.

Guiding Principles

DEC will:

1. provide a broad range of opportunities for the community to be involved in its activities;
2. develop volunteer projects that are sustainable in their own right;
3. maximise the benefit accrued through efficient use of government resources;
4. protect and support the uniqueness of local volunteer projects;
5. provide access to volunteering opportunities for all ages and abilities;
6. develop and manage programs that match current community and volunteer demands and plan dynamically for the future;
7. provide appropriate training and support for volunteers;
8. coordinate collaborative marketing, promotion, enrolment and management of DEC volunteers and delivery of projects;

9. facilitate strategic government and private sector investment;
10. ensure value for money; and,
11. create volunteering opportunities for Aboriginal people and ethnic groups.

DEC acknowledges that:

- volunteering is not a substitute for paid work;
- volunteers in DEC have similar rights, privileges and responsibilities to paid employees and are required to adhere to the DEC staff "Code of Conduct";
- volunteers should be acknowledged, recognised and reimbursed for approved expenses.

The mission of the Department of Environment and Conservation

"Working with the community, we will ensure that Western Australia's environment is valued, protected and conserved, for its intrinsic value, and for the benefit of present and future generations".

Vision for DEC's Volunteers

"A vibrant network of volunteers happy to help care for our natural environment".

Objectives

- To encourage and facilitate voluntary activity that contributes to recreation, nature conservation and environmental objectives and which builds community awareness, understanding and support for these objectives.
- To develop volunteer management systems that facilitate engagement of volunteers and volunteer organizations.
- To enhance community support for the protection of native flora and fauna, and the protected areas system in Western Australia.
- To ensure volunteer contributions will provide significant benefit to conserving biodiversity, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and generally supporting "eco-education" initiatives.

Strategies

- More effectively use the skills and expertise of volunteers.
- Achieve economies of scale through integration of volunteer programs.
- Review management systems for volunteers.
- Increase numbers of volunteers and partner with non-government organisations to more effectively lead and coordinate volunteers.

Targets

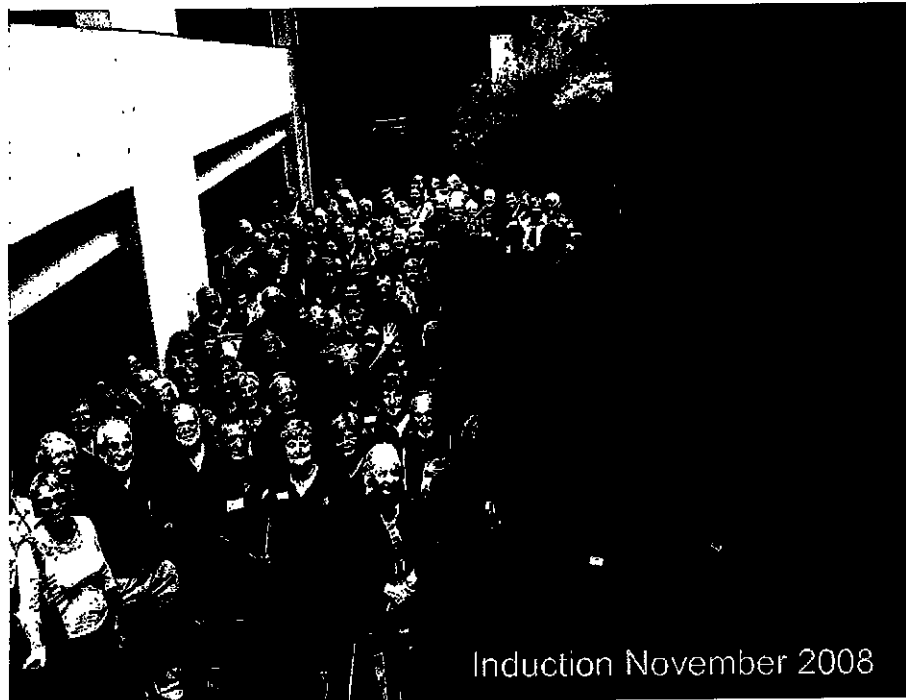
- Increase the number of active, registered volunteers by 30% above 2010 levels by 2016.
- Increase the number of volunteer hours by 30% above 2010 levels by 2016.
- Increase the number of hours per volunteer by 30% above the long-term average of 114 hours/ volunteer by 2016.
- Increase the economic value of volunteer contributions by 30% above 2010 levels by 2016.

Implementation

Strategy	Strategic Initiative	Implementation Stakeholders
1. More effectively use the skills and experience of volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify pathways and roles for volunteers who may manage specialist volunteer programs for DEC. • Develop comprehensive job descriptions for volunteers in all DEC programs. • Seek expressions of interest for voluntary positions requiring professional, trade, and academic skills, knowledge and experience. • Appoint volunteers to supervise and manage projects and working groups. 	DEC volunteer coordinators, branch managers.
2. Achieve economies of scale through integration of volunteer programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate planning and delivery of all volunteer functions in DEC. • Complete an audit of volunteer programs in DEC. • Establish an officers working group to coordinate activities / actions and system development. • Centralise and update collection of volunteer records • Develop an annual program of significant volunteer events. • Complete the adoption of web-based volunteer management systems. 	Community Involvement Unit, Community Education Branch, EcoEducation and Keep Australia Beautiful Council, Perth Observatory, Recreation and Trails Unit, Regional Parks Branch, Swan River Trust, WA Herbarium.
3. Review management systems for volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share recruiting, induction, training, and retention strategies across all divisions of DEC. • Provide ongoing and regular volunteer supervisor training for staff. • Support non-government organisation (NGO) volunteer groups in development of "best practice" for 	Volunteer coordinators branch managers, Directors. Major related NGOs.

	<p>volunteer and association management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm reporting/ discussion processes between the respective trade unions and DEC to ensure compliance with the intent not to displace paid employees. 	
<p>4. Increase numbers of volunteers and partner with non-government organisations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support volunteer management by NGOs or other established not for profit volunteer organisations. • Investigate and implement contracts with NGOs that may best manage specialist DEC volunteer programs. • Confirm arrangements within existing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). Develop more effective marketing and promotion tools to better inform the public and corporate sectors about volunteering opportunities in DEC. • Review and standardise the DEC volunteer reward system. 	<p>All of above. Conservation Volunteers Australia; Munda Biddi and Bibbulmun Track Foundations; friends groups; Leave No Trace Australia.</p>

ATTACHMENT 1 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION



Background

Definition of volunteers

"Volunteers are people who choose to donate their time and effort, without financial gain, by sharing their knowledge, expertise, skills and interests for the benefit and wellbeing of others or the community".

The socio economic context

Volunteering in Western Australia has been estimated to contribute a volume of work equivalent to 145,000 jobs or an additional 13.6 percent of paid employees per annum. This economic contribution was estimated at \$6.6 billion. Volunteers are therefore an immensely valuable resource to Western Australia.

The "Economic Value of Volunteering in Western Australia" (Ironmonger, D., 2009) reports a value of \$63 million per annum for volunteering in environmental and animal welfare organisations.

In a similar context, 3,038 DEC volunteers in 2009/10 recorded 451,040 hours of support to projects across the state valued at \$15.67 million (equivalent to 230 additional full time staff). 11,082 registered DEC volunteers outnumber paid staff by a ratio of more than 5:1.

More difficult to quantify, but nonetheless significant, are the mental and physical health benefits accrued to individuals, families and communities.

Regular interaction with others for a common purpose provides an increased sense of self worth, a renewed feeling of belonging and maintains social and communication skills.

Volunteer projects on DEC-managed lands and waters often provide a setting that allows families to work together, and will usually provide vertical generational interaction across all ages and experience.

The scale (volume) of service

The scale of volunteering is considerable, with more than one-third of the adult population in Western Australia contributing to the formal volunteering initiatives of many organisations. Informal, unrecorded volunteering is also very prevalent with many individuals preferring to contribute on an ad hoc basis and not be registered by the host organisation. While a large number of the "baby boomer" generation make up DEC's volunteer workforce, they may have the characteristic of not wishing to commit over a long period, so therefore they may turn up to assist with weeding, planting, or rubbish collection events, to participate for a few days but not providing a long-term commitment. Those who do register are tending to provide more hours than previously. The table below indicates volunteering trends within DEC over the last 12 years.

DEC Community Involvement Volunteers 1998 – 2010

YEAR	Number registered	New projects	Number of volunteers contributing	Number of hours	Hours per volunteer
1998 – 99	2,400	19	836	108,630	130
1999 - 00	3,800	12	1,400	121,000	86
2000 – 01	4,499	26	1,600	190,000	119
2001 - 02	5,683	20	2,500	217,000	87
2002 - 03	5,160	32	3,150	264,000	84
2003 - 04	6,100	30	2,700	355,000	131
2004 - 05	7,600	28	4,000	422,000	106
2005 - 06	8,230	6	3,882	470,600	121
2006 - 07	9,726	8	3,250	406,000	125
2007 - 08	7,784	9	3,439	424,500	124
2008 - 09	9,558	7	4,004	426,200	106
2009 – 10	11,082	23	3,038	451,040	148

The quality of service

Traditionally volunteering activity in DEC often provided low-skilled labour for tasks such as weeding, planting, assisting with trapping, measuring and counting native wildlife, trail building or other manual tasks.

A pattern has emerged where special interest groups have developed significant governance capabilities or academic or technical specialist knowledge and skills of a very high level.

For example, the Bibbulmun Track Foundation supports DEC by marketing, promoting and maintaining the Bibbulmun Track. A dynamic board has been active for many years, seeks sponsorship and grants, conducts events and organises members for governance, administration, maintenance and guiding tasks. Other similar groups include the Munda Biddi Trail Foundation and the Friends of the Cape to Cape Track.

In the wildlife protection area, several wildlife rehabilitation groups have established extensive premises, employ staff, and engage specialist volunteers for the care of sick, injured or orphaned native animals. A number of these are significant entities with some recording an annual turnover in excess of \$1 million. Many volunteer members have developed high level animal nursing and veterinary skills, and may also engage volunteer veterinarians.

At the larger established centres, close collaboration with universities allows research to be conducted.

There is an increasing opportunity and demand for volunteers to also contribute their professional skills and knowledge to volunteering projects that will benefit environment and conservation initiatives. Some frustration has been expressed that the trade, professional and academic skills that they bring with them are not recognised and are under used.

Volunteers have demonstrated the ability to become acknowledged experts in their chosen area of interest. One Herbarium volunteer, for example, has published several books on eucalypts and many other volunteers are acknowledged as experts in their chosen area of interest.

The benefits of volunteering

The economic, social, mental and physical health benefits of volunteering have been mentioned above but in addition there are a number of significant benefits which volunteering in DEC provides:

- The opportunity for members of the public to participate in the conservation and environmental initiatives of the department, and through that practical interaction gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the work of the department.
- Establishment of a mobilised support base that may advocate support for DEC initiatives.
- Work experience and career development for all sections of the community.
- Veterinary students may gain specialist practical experience whilst volunteering at one of the wildlife rehabilitation centres.

- o Aboriginal volunteers may enjoy re-connection with the land, gain trade skills and experience, and make good contacts that may allow them to consider work with DEC or within Aboriginal tourism initiatives.

Trends in volunteering

While traditionally volunteer projects have been purpose or task oriented, there is a growing appreciation by the corporate sector and other non-government entities that the opportunity for volunteering is of benefit to individual employees and members and should be encouraged and supported.

Visionary employers may arrange for groups of staff to participate *en bloc* at a suitable site or premises to allow rapid improvement or change due to the group numbers involved. In addition, employers may include provision for regular volunteering within employment conditions for individuals.

Within secondary education provision, the concept of "Community Service" as a valid educational outcome is increasingly accepted.

At tertiary level, we see the development of "volunteering hubs" to better facilitate the connection between willing students and organisations seeking support.

Volunteers on average (across Australia) contribute \$600 each year in out of pocket expenses. A survey in 2006 indicated that 10 percent of volunteers had changed activity due to rising costs.