

Cycling trip leads to career change

ALAN Sands heard about the amalgamation that was to become the Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management while he was in Perth during a cycling holiday around Australia.

But it wasn't until he reached Adelaide that he actually saw the advertisement.

Alan said that with the amalgamation under the CALM Act of three land management agencies: Forests Department, The National Parks Authority and the wildlife component of Fisheries and Wildlife, it looked as if there could be an interesting and challenging future here that he very much wanted to be a part of—so he promptly applied.

"I'd been working with an environmental consultancy, advising on impact assessments and preparing rehabilitation plans for open-cut coal mines in the Hunter Valley," Alan said.

"My duties also included landscape architecture and recreation planning. I had a degree in landscape architecture and a post-graduate diploma in natural resource management.

"When I arrived in Manjimup, my impression was that the staff were highly enthusiastic and committed, both to their individual roles and to the new department's objectives.

"There was a positive feeling abroad, although, as one might expect, there were those who held some residual loyalty to their former organisations.

"Initially, as parks and reserves officer, I expected to be involved in, say, 70 per cent natural resource management and 30 per cent recreation management. It has turned out to be more like 80 per cent recreation visitor management and 20 per cent natural resource management.

"I found that managers were prepared to take the risk of backing my proposals for projects, and the district officers and crews were generally keen to try anything new, although there was some

good-natured fun to be had at my expense, being the 'wise man from the east'.

"While there was a great deal to be learnt from existing staff, Ian, Neil and I were, to some extent, our own support system.

"We were 'cleanskins' in a very new department where we were largely without mentors, so we met every month or two to share tactics, processes, strategies and ideas.

"Because of our varied employment backgrounds, there was a fair amount of cross-fertilisation of ideas for projects that we carried out, each under the very different circumstances peculiar to our own region.

"Among the first major initiatives I remember vividly was the Four Aces—One-Tree Bridge project that called for the establishment of a new car park and picnic facilities, with as little disturbance as possible to trees growing on the site.

"The commitment, enterprise and skills displayed by the Manjimup District crew were impressive to behold, and the way they wholeheartedly embraced my request to minimise damage to trees was incredible.

"For example, the crew used 'dozers and front-end loaders to carefully juggle intertwining branches, one or two at a time, so that the tree that was required to be removed, didn't rip out its neighbours' branches.

"The Big Brook Dam development in regrowth forest was another major initiative, followed by the establishment of the annual Big Brook Relay.

"I can still see the look of concern on former Pemberton district manager Bob Hagan's face, when the scale of the Big Brook development was revealed—he'd barely recovered from the Shannon River development, which had been a long, tedious process.

"Nevertheless, Bob supported the Big Brook

Dam project, and much of the credit for its successful completion goes to him and the Pemberton team.

"I'm pleased to see the continual development of recreation policy; it has been an incredibly valuable tool, along with the range of technical manuals prepared by Recreation and Landscape staff.

"More recently, policies that encourage partnerships with private enterprise organisations, and working with volunteers, have meant that projects that otherwise would have gathered dust at the plan-on-paper stage, were successfully completed.

"Much of the improvement in visitor services can be linked to the partnership between the recreation and the interpretation and education groups.

"Sound liaison between the two has ensured that people enjoy, as well as understand, the natural settings they visit.

"Being with CALM has given me the opportunity to work alongside people with a wide variety of skills, to achieve sound land-management practices and to service the visitor.

"Just as I have been supported and empowered by managers to get things done, I also have been given the opportunity to support and work with others to do likewise.

"Looking ahead, I hope to continue to be part of a team that develops visitor facilities that are both environmentally and financially sustainable.

"I believe the process of change will be heavily focused on the delivery and maintenance of the facilities and programs on which much of the State's tourism indirectly depends.

"I will be concentrating my efforts on finding ways to better manage the natural environment, providing facilities and services for visitors, and securing appropriate funding to maintain and upgrade the assets we have."



Alan Sands pauses outdoors on one of his recent visits to CALM's Corporate Relations Division.
Photo by Peter Costello

