

Neil bowled over by region's size

NEIL Taylor was an accountant who decided the 'great indoors' were too stifling, so after gaining his Diploma in Recreation Planning, he worked as a park ranger with the Australian Capital Territory Conservation Service, followed by a spell as manager at Jervis Bay Nature Reserve.

Jervis Bay was probably an ideal training ground for any challenges CALM might throw at Neil.

One million people a year visited the 2200-hectare nature reserve that included pine plantations, an Aboriginal settlement, three campgrounds, a school, a police station, a missile range and an 800-hectare marine park that also housed the Royal Australian Navy's Cadet Training Centre and contained 12 km of moving sand dunes.

"I was responsible for about 22 full-time, permanent staff, and all the hassles that entails, so it was with relief that I looked forward to working with CALM where I had far less staff responsibilities.

"It meant I could spend more time on actually getting things done.

"My first over-riding impression was of the vastness of CALM's Central Forest Region, (1.2 million hectares) and the amount of time I spent travelling.

"Even before I set out for the day's destinations, I had to travel 100 km from my home at Yallingup to the office in Bunbury; generally, I could visit no more than two districts in any one day.

"At Jervis Bay, there was little formal training offered, and we flew by the seat of our pants, learning mostly by trial and error.

"With CALM, training has been a high priority, and we've been able to take advantage of many training courses and seminars, including attendance at important conferences, whether held in WA or interstate.

"The three of us were 'new kids on the block', so

we looked to each other for moral support out of which a firm and lasting friendship has developed between us.

"Major initiatives have relied on a diversity of skills among a small number of staff.

"This certainly has been the case with the development of the Lower Collie Valley on Wellington Dam, where a small campground has been enlarged and fees are being collected there for the first time.

"The largely saline dam has been developed for recreation purposes, while water for human consumption will come from another dam, completed recently.

"The VISTAT (visitor statistics) program, is another major initiative being carried out in our parks' improvement program.

"Another interesting initiative of an historical nature, has seen the installation of hand-operated water pumps in the bush, that have met with an enthusiastic response from park visitors.

"Central Forest was the first region to introduce the 'no bins—please take your rubbish home' policy, which met with very little resistance from visitors, and staff found it a great time saver.

"Before this, garbage collection could take a whole day, much of it travelling to the more remote areas where, even if there was very little litter in the bins, the collection still had to be done.

"My career with CALM continues to be most satisfying and challenging, but I'm fortunate to have the support of my wife, Gail, who, apart from caring for our children, works as an interviewer for the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

"We now live only five minutes drive from the coast at Injidup near Yallingup, a great escape for us, and for our three terrific kids: Alison (15), Heather (13), and James who is nearly 7 years old.

"Over the past ten years, I have seen myself move from recreation planner on a regional basis, to that on a district basis.

"It's been a deliberate choice on my part, and one with which I feel very comfortable. (Besides, I can now cycle to and from work!)

"On balance, I lean towards working at the grass roots rather than at the policy level, but that doesn't mean I have scaled down my ambitions, one of which is to see the 120-km Cape Naturaliste to Cape Leeuwin walk trail completed.

"Looking ahead, I'd like to see CALM making more use of volunteers, particularly at recreation sites, and while training volunteers is very time consuming, with so few staff available to carry it out, it is well worth while where it can be done.

"I've found that these wonderful people are the best allies CALM possibly can have.

"I believe the CALM Act needs to be modified to give field staff greater authority to collect fines on the spot for minor common offences, such as taking timber from State forests, bringing dogs into national parks, driving four-wheel drive vehicles on dunes and so on.

"I would also like to see the Conto campground in the Boranup Forest area revamped to accommodate a greater range of camper types, such as tents, including on-site safari tents, and cabins.

"One of the most recent and most exciting projects in which I'm involved is as chairman of a committee developing a cave interpretation centre to be built adjacent to Lake Cave at Margaret River.

The project is budgeted at \$1.5 million and we have already secured substantial grants towards having the building open by December 1995.

"Although the project is on Tourist Bureau land, it will have substantial spinoffs for CALM's management of wild caves.

"The past decade has seen the Department achieve a great deal, and while there's still much to be done, there's no doubt in my mind about the future for the good ship CALM and all who sail in her—it looks exciting and challenging."



Neil Taylor looks at effects of coastal erosion at Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park. Photo by Nick Way, courtesy Busselton-Margaret River Times



Neil Taylor. at LNRA blow-out.

Please credit Busselton-Margaret Times.