

# THE DESTRUCTION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S HERITAGE AND HABITAT

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Western Australia is definitely a state on the move, a state of excitement, a good place to live . . . but there is a cost. In this state the cost appears to be our natural heritage.

The last edition of S.W.A.N.S., Volume 8 Number 1 featured an article called "People . . . They Just Slay You"; this story could be read in conjunction with that article.

In the past years of so called "progress" one can look at most of our worldly achievements with some sort of pride. On the other hand it is sad but inevitable that evolution in the 20th century has forsaken some of the natural qualities of life on Earth.

To have to explain or account for this statement could lead to the usual emotional fog of words that always succeeds in camouflaging the real issues. If one does not understand, then it is probable that one is already lost to the "system".

The famous American Indian Chief Seattle once wrote in a letter to the United States' President Franklin Pierce, "We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of the land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land what he needs. The earth is not his brother, but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on. He leaves his father's grave behind and he does not care . . . His father's grave and his children's birthright are forgotten.

He treats his mother, the earth, and his brother, the sky, as things to be bought, plundered, sold like sheep or bright beads. His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only a desert."



A Bulldozer and Grubbing chain when indiscriminately used, successfully converts bushland into an organized desert.



The Coblinine River near its efflux with Lake Dumbleyung. Salt intrusion has gradually killed all nearby vegetation. Stock grazing and wind erosion have denuded the beaches and the water is now many times more salty than sea water. If it weren't for nearby farm dams and some aquatic vegetation the Coblinine would have no birdlife whatsoever.

Most of the Western third of Australia is natural desert or semi arid bushland. In Western Australia's one hundred and fifty years of settlement, the clearing of land for agriculture, mining and other industries has been done on an extensive front, using modern machinery and techniques. The bulldozer, the tractor and the chainsaw in the hands of men, have made alterations to our countryside easier, faster and therefore more ruthless. In the past, stands of large trees have been easily disposed of and wetlands energetically reclaimed. This extreme and sudden depredation of vegetation and landscape has now left us with 1.2 per cent of the state's farm-lands affected by salt intrusion. Not only are there large tracts of land barren of natural vegetation but the soil itself is continuing to deteriorate in its ability to successfully grow agricultural crops.

Salt tolerant vegetation can be planted to stop erosion etc. but what may have taken 50 years to destroy, will take hundreds of years, if ever, to achieve original status. We will try to rehabilitate the land by employing experts and scientists, but can they really give nature the hurry on?

It's time for us all to wake up. The over exploitation of property, resources and people is old fashioned. Western Australia will continue to develop and its population will continue to grow, demanding more produce and employment. But let's cultivate for tomorrow while we harvest today. It's up to every individual to put back a little quality into our environment. Develop but develop with thought and compassion.

As it stands, in 200 years time none of us will be here; but in looking past the banners, headlines and ego trips, does anybody really care?