



Western Australian Environment Awards calls for nominations

NOMINATIONS are now being called for the 2010 WA Environment Awards.

The awards acknowledge businesses, government agencies, community groups and individuals who make a valuable contribution to protecting and conserving the State's natural environment.

Now in its ninth year, the Environment Awards recognise projects that are setting new benchmarks in environmental care, sustainability and biodiversity conservation.

Department of Environment and Conservation Strategic Development and Corporate Affairs Director Ron Kawalilak said the awards were open to all Western Australians who contributed to the protection, enhancement and sustainability of the State's environment – whether it be conserving native bushland, minimising waste, caring for native wildlife, implementing energy efficiency measures or rehabilitating estuarine environments.

"Last year, the awards attracted 104 entries including individuals and community groups with small, local initiatives through to government departments, small business and large corporations," he said.

"We received entries from all over the State from as far north as Kununurra and inland Kalgoorlie to Esperance in the south.

"For winners, success in these awards has provided recognition of their outstanding achievements and has benefited their initiatives through greater community awareness."

Ron said the quality of nominations continued to improve each year and the winners, as well as all

the WA Environment Award nominees and finalists, demonstrated the commitment Western Australia has shown in supporting sustainable development and environmental care in our State.

If you believe the community group you volunteer/work with or the organisation you are employed by deserve recognition for environmental excellence then please apply. Entry is free.

This year there are 11 categories:

- Corporate Business Leading by Example
- Government Leading by Example
- Small Business Leading by Example
- Biodiversity Conservation
- Bush, Land and Waterways
- Resource and Waste Management
- Environmental Education and Communication
- Community Energy Efficiency
- Rivers, Estuaries and Wetlands
- Community Achievement – Regional
- Community Achievement – Metropolitan

An overall environment award winner is chosen from the category winners.

The 2010 awards nomination period closes on Friday 23 July 2010. Award winners will be announced at a gala presentation dinner to be held on 6 November 2010.

Nomination forms and more information can be found at www.dec.wa.gov.au/awards.

The awards are sponsored by the Waste Authority, Western Power, Swan River Trust, Whiteman Park, Office of Energy, Packaging Stewardship Forum, Royalties for Regions and Publishers National Environment Bureau.



DEC National Park Ranger Paul Udinga (right) and former employee Wayne Schmidt (left) were recently presented medals to recognise their contribution to the community at a ceremony at Government House. Paul, who was involved in a rescue at Karijini National Park, received an Australian Bravery Medal and Wayne received a Public Service Medal for his outstanding service to parks and visitor services. See 'Paul's bravery recognised with national honour' (25 August 2009) and 'Former DEC staffer recognised with Australia Day honour' (9 February 2010).



DEC pollution response in the Kimberley

DEC recently played a key role in coordinating the clean-up response to a diesel spill in Halls Creek that had the potential to contaminate the town's drinking water.

Pollution Response Officer Mark Brand was dispatched quickly to Halls Creek after the Shire of Halls Creek reported a leak in excess of 10,000 litres in an above-ground diesel storage tank in the shire's depot. He was supported by Kimberley Region staff and worked with officers from the Shire of Halls Creek, Department of Water and the Water Corporation.

Environmental Hazard Branch Manager Ken Raine said Mark and the others involved had worked in difficult conditions but the support they provided was invaluable.

"Halls Creek relies on shallow ground water for its drinking supply, and the nearest water bore was only 200 metres away. As the spill had the potential to contaminate the town's drinking water, early intervention was imperative," he said.

"Mark was deployed by air to the Kimberley from Perth at short notice, and worked with the local DEC staff, authorities and contractors to develop an emergency response including carrying out a large excavation of the soil in the depot.

"This was challenging as the soil was extremely hard to excavate and there was a threat of heavy rain. Mark had to order heavier earth-moving equipment to accomplish the task and had to work into the nights to get the job done."

Ken said that the spill resulted in the excavation of more than 1,000 cubic metres of soil which had to be transported to a hastily constructed temporary storage facility at the town's landfill site.

"Once the immediate threat to the town's water source was abated, Mark returned to Perth and the regional office continued to assess any further impact on groundwater users in the vicinity of the spill and help manage the long-term recovery," he said.

"The extent of the contamination to the region's groundwater resources will also be monitored."



Suburban laundry fire sparks pollution response

WHEN Environmental Hazard Branch Manager Ken Raine's phone rang at 5.20am one morning last month, he knew it couldn't be good news. And it wasn't.

The call was a request for assistance at a fire at an industrial laundry facility in Hamilton Hill in Perth's south, which was blowing toxic smoke towards houses.

Ken said that while the Fire and Emergency Services Authority was the agency in charge of the incident, DEC was called on to carry out air monitoring to determine the threat to community health.

"This incident was classed as a Code 3, which indicates there is an imminent risk to public health and the environment," he said.

"DEC responded with four officers and three pollution response vehicles.

"As a result of our air monitoring, it was deemed necessary to evacuate about 20 people from a block of

townhouses as there was concern about the toxicity of the smoke from the fire that was impacting the units.

"A Pollution Response Officer wearing respiratory protection assisted Police with the evacuation."

Ken said in situations like these DEC had a number of priorities.

"Our first priority is to protect and secure public health," he said.

"Then we strive to protect the environment and provide assistance to ensure there is an adequate clean-up.

"Finally, we collect evidence, which can be important to determining the cause of the incident and can provide information that is often crucial in further action being taken in relation to the cause of the incident and enforcement under the Environmental Protection Act.

"In this case, it was determined the fire was accidentally caused due to spontaneous combustion of dishcloths."



John Watson receives ACKMA Fellowship Award in Malaysia

DEC's Albany-based Parks and Visitor Services Policy and Projects Officer Dr John Watson, attended the second Global Geotourism Conference and the Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association's (ACKMA) AGM and Field Meeting while on holiday recently.

Both events were based at the Gunung Mulu National Park World Heritage Area in Sarawak, Malaysia.

The Global Geotourism Conference was attended by 80 delegates from 12 countries—somewhat less than the numbers who attended the first conference held in Fremantle which was co-sponsored by DEC and hosted by FACET (Forum Advocating Cultural and Eco Tourism).

John presented a paper, *Simply 'Being there'—a legitimate point on the geotourism opportunity spectrum*, at the conference.

John said it was a valuable, small conference which made up for its limited formal discussion opportunities through the ample time available for networking.

"I received much positive feedback on my own presentation and felt that the effort to prepare it had been time well spent," he said.

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President of ACKMA Steve Bourne presenting (right) John Watson with his Fellowship Certificate, ACKMA AGM, Mulu, April 2010.

Following the conclusion of the Global Geotourism Conference, John attended the ACKMA AGM and field meeting, which was also attended by DEC staff Anne Wood, Sharon Thwaites, Kirsty Dixon, Neil Taylor and Tracey Robins, who all, like John, attended in a private capacity.

"ACKMA is the representative body for cave and karst management in the Australasian region. It comprises a unique mix of agency and private persons including show cave managers and cave guides, researchers, speleologists, tour operators, protected area personnel and managers, and planners—largely from Australia and New Zealand but also with some members from South East Asia," John said.

For the first time, the 2010 AGM and biennial Field Meeting was held outside Australia and New Zealand at Mulu and was deliberately planned to run back-to-back with the Global Geotourism Conference.

John said the unprecedented large attendance of 90 people to the AGM was an indication of the significance of the location.

"The AGM's record numbers were due to the renowned and outstanding karst at Mulu, its world heritage status and the presence of Gunung Mulu Park Manager Brian Clark (PSM), formerly manager of the World Heritage-Listed Narracorte Caves National Park in South Australia and a long time executive member of ACKMA," he said.

"I used the opportunity to visit a complete range of caves in a world heritage area, from the easiest of tourist caves, to easy adventure, intermediate adventure and the more serious hard adventure levels."

The first two days of the meeting were held in Niah on Borneo's north coast.

"The Niah Great Cave contains important evidence of human occupation extending back some 40,000 thousand years and is still a harvesting site for swiftle, nests which are

used to make bird nest products favoured in Chinese cuisine," John said.

The field meeting then moved back to Mulu where John was nominated and accepted as a Fellow of ACKMA at the AGM, in recognition of work to establish the first Western Australian caves and karst working group (agency personnel and speleologists) during his time with the former Department of Conservation and Environment in the 1970s.

The award was also in recognition of John's management of the Margaret River area under the former National Parks Authority up until 1985 and management of the WA Southern Nullarbor under the National Parks Authority, CALM and DEC until 2008.

John also initiated and coordinated editorship of the IUCN (World Conservation Union) international Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection in 1997 and is currently finalising a draft Caves and Karst Policy for DEC.

"The ACKMA Fellowship Award was unexpected but a great honour. I would also like to acknowledge my DEC Parks and Visitor Services colleague Caves Manager at Margaret River Anne Wood, who has previously received a similar award from ACKMA for her own long-term contributions to cave and karst management culminating in the organisation of last year's ACKMA AGM and Field Meeting held in Margaret River," he said.

"My attendance at both the Global Geotourism Conference and the ACKMA AGM and Field Meeting was extremely worthwhile on a number of grounds. It was particularly valuable in providing additional insights into both the DEC Caves and Karst Policy and, to some degree, the DEC Non-indigenous Cultural Heritage Policy work that I am also undertaking... and Mulu is such an outstanding World Heritage Area."



DEC translocates endangered red-tailed phascogale

DEC staff have released 20 red-tailed phascogales with the hope of reintroducing the mouse-sized, carnivorous animal to parts of its former habitat in the south-west.

In late May, 12 female and eight male red-tailed phascogales were released into Kojonup Reserve, 15 kilometres north-east of Kojonup, as part of the Threatened Fauna Ark Project.

DEC Project Officer Gareth Watkins said the wild animals were trapped at various DEC reserves in the Wheatbelt and released into wooden nesting boxes positioned in rock sheoak trees in Kojonup Reserve, which is managed by Bush Heritage Australia.

"Red-tailed phascogales are restricted to isolated fragments of vegetation in the southern Wheatbelt, and are at serious threat due to habitat loss, altered fire regimes, predation and reduced rainfall," Gareth said.

"The translocation site remains one of the largest intact remnants of wandoo woodland in the region and, being adjacent to a nature reserve, the project has the potential to re-establish a self sustaining population of the species within its former distribution."

Gareth said it was important for the animals to be

translocated before mating begins in July, as red-tailed phascogale males die at the conclusion of their first, and very short, breeding season.

"Males exhaust much of their energy reserves during the frenetic mating season and as a result, promptly die at the age of about 11.5 months, while females can live up to three years and can reproduce two or three times during this period," Gareth said.

The translocated animals are being radio-tracked for the first two weeks by DEC, and during spring the nesting boxes will be checked for activity and hopefully reproduction success. Long-term monitoring will be undertaken by Bush Heritage Australia.

Bush Heritage Australia ecologist Angela Sanders said the next 12 months would be spent closely monitoring the nesting sites and managing the reserve to maximise the animals' chances of survival.

"What we do on the ground is imperative to the survival of our new residents on Kojonup Reserve, and this will include feral animal control, particularly fox baiting," she said.

As well as working closely with Bush Heritage, the project is acting in conjunction with research, development

and management by Wagin-Woodanilling Landcare Inc.

Members of Wagin Care and Share and other community members constructed the wooden nesting boxes that are designed specifically to cater for the red-tailed phascogale.

"The translocation has encouraged community involvement while promoting an inter-organisational collaborative approach to the conservation of the red-tailed phascogale," Gareth said.



DEC Technical Officer Amy Mutton releasing a red-tailed phascogale.

Waste Wise Schools continues to grow

DEC's Waste Wise Schools program has encouraged 70 Western Australian schools to achieve their Waste Wise accreditation, with more than 600 schools currently working towards becoming more waste wise.

Community Education Coordinator Wendy Aspden said in order to receive accreditation, schools in the program needed to reach certain benchmarks.

"Benchmarks include forming a committee, writing a waste reduction plan and policy and conducting a waste audit at their school," she said.

"When schools become accredited they receive a sign in recognition of their contribution to waste reduction in WA."

The accreditation scheme, which was unveiled earlier this year by Environment Minister Donna Faragher, recognises the efforts of teachers and students in

building a whole-school approach to waste reduction and sustainable environmental activities.

The program encourages schools to reduce their waste by implementing the three 'R's—reduce, re-use and recycle, all while developing positive environmental values in students and school communities.

Wendy said the *Waste Wise Schools* program, run by DEC, was primarily funded by the Waste Authority through the Western Australian landfill levy.

"Teachers at each school are provided with resources such as an operating practices manual and online curriculum-linked guides for activities on composting, worms, waste and recycling," she said.

For more information on *Waste Wise Schools* and to view the full list of accredited schools, visit www.wastewise.wa.gov.au.

