



Landcare in the Swan-Canning catchment

Looking for closer links with business

March is Landcare month and the aim this year is to promote better cooperation between business and the wider community. Here, Jenena Hosja looks at the 2000 sq km Swan-Canning catchment and the growing ties between industry and rivercare groups.

PARTNERSHIPS between schools, community groups, government agencies, and industry are essential for the success and efficiency of projects created to manage and protect our precious waterways.

The current level of cooperation in the Swan-Canning catchment is being fuelled by a small band of dedicated Western Australians from primary school children through to the managers of big business. Industry sponsorship for river and wetland rehabilitation and protection is a vital source of support – without it many community groups would be fighting a losing battle.

The theme of this year's Landcare Month is cooperation and the aim is improved catchment management through closer partnerships between community and business. In the Swan-Canning catchment, business has only just begun its involvement in river and wetland restoration. Traditionally the enemy of conservation groups, industry has been slow to leap onto the public relations bandwagon pioneered by companies such as Alcoa of Australia.

continued page two

Painting drains with the stencils **DRAINS TO RIVER** or **CLEAN WATER ONLY** is part of a project to raise public awareness of the importance of stormwater drainage to the health of our rivers and wetlands.

The Swan River Trust has a number of stencils available for use by community groups who want to carry out a similar project to the one Bayswater Integrated Catchment Management (BICM) has begun along the streets of its catchment.

The stencils are available in two sizes to suit kerbs and the concrete surrounding drains. Rules apply to the use of the stencils, including stencil user obtaining permission from their local government authority before stencilling and maintaining a written record of areas stencilled. Stencil users should wear appropriate and light coloured clothing to make sure they are highly visible to motorists

For more information, stencils and a copy of the rules, contact Tim Larcombe on 278 0404. □



Right John Forrest Senior High School Year 10 Environment Club students Joanna Lewis and Shirley Loh turn graffiti art to good use on sreet drains flowing to the Bayswater Main Drain. Also pictured: maths teacher Mr Ossy Schokman and BICM coordinator Rosemary Glass.

Left Rules apply to the use of the stencils including position on concrete section of the drain or kerb – not on roads or footpaths.

Good graffiti to halt drain strain



◀ Landcare in the Swan-Canning

from page one

Community groups are starting to explore new ways to secure funding from business and industry to support their rehabilitation activities and businesses have yet to feel pressured into taking a greater role.

Greening Western Australia is one organisation that has received increased support from industry - having recently signed a further 12 month \$215,000 sponsorship agreement with one of its major corporate sponsors, Alcoa of Australia. This sponsorship extends Alcoa's original five-year \$1 million sponsorship of Greening WA.

In 1995, Alcoa provided \$41,000 towards the Chain of Diamonds program. This urban wetlands habitat protection project incorporates a number of initiatives aimed at increasing community awareness of the value of wetlands. The project is designed to assist active groups to build on what already exists. Greening WA are eager to impart their message of the vital role that wetlands play in the health of natural systems and to recruit more members.

Wetlands involved in the Chain of Diamonds usually comply with the following criteria. They must have: *an action plan *high visibility *long-term tenure *a high level of community interest *an active "friends of" group *usefulness as a demonstration site *and an established concept that achieves something in the first year.

Alcoa also provides support for landcare activities in areas such as Cockburn, Armadale, Kwinana and Serpentine-Jarrahdale through the Alcoa-Region Landcare Project. Landcare includes any one of the range of actions that community groups can participate in that make lasting improvements to their local environment and that halt or reverse further degradation. Preference is given to physical on-the-ground works, such as protection, revegetation and implementation of sustainable practices.

Sponsorship criteria

Individual sponsorships range between \$5000 to \$15,000. Projects seeking funds need to demonstrate an "off-site" or wider environmental benefit to the community; should feature physical on-ground works; attract funding from other sources; have approval of the landholder to proceed; be technically sound; be demonstrations of works that could be replicated on a broader scale; and should be undertaken by groups that have wide community participation.

Examples of activities funded in the 1994 and 1995 Alcoa-Region Landcare Project include the Kwinana Naturalists Club's two-year \$23,240 project using seedlings, earthworks, fencing materials and sprays to rehabilitate a major wetland, and the Wetlands Conservation Society's \$8,520 project (over two years) to plant seedlings to rehabilitate, protect and revegetate wetlands at Bibra Lake.

At the official signing of the Alcoa sponsorship, Environment Minister Mr Peter Foss acknowledged Alcoa's commitment to improving the environment and the importance of strong partnerships between community groups, government and the corporate sector in overcoming the environmental problems facing WA.

"Just as our flora and fauna rely on partnerships to thrive in what is a rugged and often inhospitable environment, so do the organisations that work to protect it. By pooling resources and coordinating our efforts, we give ourselves the best chance of ongoing success," Mr Foss said.

An organisation that would support this philosophy is Ecosystem Management Services, a company of urban

landcare experts working to save Perth's polluted wetland and foreshore environment. EMS is run by Noranda Nursery manager Ms Linda Taman, who has assembled volunteers to rehabilitate and landscape deteriorated areas. Last year EMS provided native plants worth \$250,000 for Perth's degraded river and wetlands. Ms Taman believes community groups can solve the pollution problems that affect areas such as Ellen Brook and the Bayswater Main Drain.

In the Ellen Brook catchment, Tiwest Joint Venture has joined forces with Bullsbrook District High School to restore two degraded wetland areas at Tiwest's Chandala Mineral Sands processing plant, near

Muchea. The program began in 1993.

Each year students from Year 7 have developed a new section of the mini-wetland in front of Tiwest's administration block, while the lower secondary students have worked on transforming a large mineral sands extraction pit into a seasonal wetland and wildlife refuge.

Head of Science Ms Heather Downing said the Tiwest wetland project has led to the school being included in an international education program managed by the United States National Oceanic and Atmosphere Admin-

istration (NOAA) via the Internet.

Ms Downing said Bullsbrook was one of 30 schools in Australia chosen to send regular geological, hydrological, biological and meteorological data through the Internet to NOAA to assist in verifying the "ground truth" of satellite images produced by NOAA. This data, recorded at Tiwest's pit (big enough to show up on the satellite images) is being sent to schools and scientific institutions around the world.

One Federal Government initiative helping solve two problems - youth unemployment and the health of the Swan-Canning river system - is the Landcare and Environment Action Program (LEAP). LEAP encourages community groups, local councils and State agencies to become involved in the management and rehabilitation of the Swan-Canning rivers by hiring unemployed youth to carry out environmental and heritage resoration work. LEAP makes sure the trainees are not just planting trees but are given practical training opportunities.

Ms Rosemary Glass, catchment coordinator for Bayswater Integrated Catchment Management (BICM) said they were addressing the need for greater support for their wetland conservation management projects from industry in the area.

Taking positive steps

"Industries and residential homes are the main land users in the Bayswater catchment and consequently both are main sources of pollution to the drain and river. Some industries are taking positive steps to improve their impact on the environment," Ms Glass said.

She said a group of heavier industries in the Bassendean light industrial area had banded together to get the deep sewerage system extended to include their operations area. These businesses are concerned about sewerage problems on their low-lying sites associated with the high water table and the affects of surface runoff draining untreated to the Swan River.

While Government policy makes connecting residen-



Students from Bullsbrook SHS working to restore a degraded site in partnership with Tiwest Joint Venture, a mineral sands processing company based in Ellen Brook.

tial areas to deep sewerage a priority, Mr Rod Burton, manager of the Water Corporation's asset management in the Perth North Region, said "investigations are underway to see if it is feasible to extend the sewerage system to the industrial area."

Ms Glass said other industries in the catchment were trying to keep ahead of their legislated requirements for pollution control. One auto repair shop has installed a treatment plant to remove oil and solvents from its wastewater, while another company approached BICM recently to propose a joint water monitoring program for a section of drain downstream of their site.

Living drains

BICM is also working with the Water Corporation to transform more of the catchment's "hard" drains into "living streams" through revegetation. The corporation has already opened one of its compensation basins in Russell Street, Morley, for an artificial wetland project involving John Forrest High School.

Water Corporation's Mr Burton said BICM's strategy to return open drains to "living stream" status is gaining support since it will improve the community's lifestyle in the long term.

"This is a huge win for the environment," Ms Glass said. "The use of instream vegetation will improve water quality and promote bird life." Ms Glass said BICM was pursuing a change in Water Corporation policy to allow for the management of drains on the basis of water quality as well as quantity.

Research is another area where business can get involved in supporting the improved health of the Swan-Canning river system. BankWest's recent sponsorship of a Swan-Canning Cleanup Program-CSIRO research project based on a barge moored in the upper reaches of the Swan resulted in a big boost to our understanding of how algae acts during certain times of the year and under certain conditions.

But despite some business sponsorship in the fight to conserve Perth's wetlands and rivers, community groups have been slow to convince local business to become involved. Increased financial support for conservation activities will lead to healthier waterways - a result which is good for the community and good for business. The public relations benefits from supporting "green" projects is one plus, and sustainable development makes sound long-term economic sense as well. □

First Rural-Urban ICM exchange held at BICM

AN ICM exchange between urban and rural landcare practitioners has opened the way for closer ties between city and country.

Representatives from Merredin LCD joined with others from around the 122,000 sq km Swan-Avon catchment for two days of information sharing and training. The event was organised by Bayswater Integrated Catchment Management (BICM).

The exchange was sponsored by the Swan River Trust as part of the Swan-Canning Cleanup Program's community group training project.

BICM coordinator Rosemary Glass said it was the first time such an event had been held. Hopefully similar exchanges will be a regular feature of ICM in the future. □

Forums to present Cleanup progress

TWO FORUMS will be held to inform the technical and general community about the progress of the Swan-Canning Cleanup Program.

Launched in May 1994, the program has been responsible for the integration of research and management activities across the Swan-Canning to improve catchment management and reduce the risk of serious algae blooms.

The first forum, on April 12, will be a technical forum held at the CSIRO auditorium in Floreat. The technical forum will focus on the results of reasearch and catchment management projects to date. As well as a review of progress and achievements over the last two years, the forum will also explore future directions and solutions to restoring the health of our rivers.

The second forum, on World Environment Day June 5, is directed toward community groups involved in river restoration. Community group members will have the chance to network with others working on-the-ground and hear

about the experiences of groups involved in the formation of community-based catchment management organisations.

The community forum will also be the venue for the expected launch of the video *Living with Streams* - a joint project with the Water and Rivers Commission and the fourth in a series of videos for schools and community groups on the use and abuse of groundwater and surface water.

A community group directory, currently in production, should also be available at the forum. Community support groups, such as Greening Western Australia and Ribbons of Blue, will present interactive demonstrations on practical aspects of rivercare.

For further information contact Cleanup Program manager John Jones (technical forum) or community relations officer Tim Larcombe on 278 0400. □



Water users asked to take care



The Water and Rivers Commission has urged landholders who draw water from the Canning and Southern-Wungong Rivers to use it wisely during hot periods.

The Water Corporation agreed in February to release water from the Canning and Wungong Dams. The main public beneficiaries would be licensed users and riparian users (owners of land bordering the rivers). Both groups draw water downstream of the dams for private use including agricultural irrigation, domestic needs and garden watering.

The other big winner from the water releases would be the river environment. During summer, stagnant pools encourage weed growth and increase the risk of algae - including the potentially toxic blue-green species which have caused problems in the Canning River in recent years. □

Top Canning River, Roleystone c.1950. Deep pools once lingered in the river through the dry summer months. Silting and weed growth have caused the loss of these pools throughout the Swan-Avon river system.

Above To reduce the risk of silt and weeds clogging their pumps, some landholders construct makeshift weirs across the river. This increases silt difficulties for landholders upstream and decreases the volume of water available for users downstream.

Water and weed training days

ENTHUSIASM for saving our environment is a welcome commodity – enthusiasm backed up with knowledge is a precious commodity.

The Swan River Trust helped organise a blackberry workshop on Saturday 3 February at which the control and best removal options for this and other weeds were discussed. Dr Luke Pen (pictured left), an ecologist with the Water and Rivers Commission, and other speakers gave up their time to help community members active in the Canning area learn more about this recalcitrant, thorny bush.

Ribbons of Blue coordinators Janet Date and Susan Worley also lent their expertise to a group of teachers on an environmental education development course as part of the Catchments, Corridors and Coasts program.

The teachers were given training in Ribbons of Blue water monitoring techniques at the Belmont Main Drain. Below, Susan directs teachers in the finer points of using the Ribbons of Blue monitoring kit. Community relations officer Tim Larcombe briefed the teachers on Trust and Cleanup Program activities along the river. □



Swan resource network update

People who took part in the Swan River Trust's community consultation in 1995 may be wondering what progress has been made toward launching the Swan Resource Centre. The project, funded under the Swan-Avon ICM Program, involves setting up community networks and resource centres in the Swan and Avon catchments to support community involvement in ICM.

The Swan Network, which will have close links with its Avon counterpart, is expected to begin operation in mid 1996. The network is based on the opinions and needs expressed by the Perth community during the public consultation. The proposals have been costed and support gained from government agencies and other sources.

Premises for a central information exchange are being negotiated in the heritage building (old Fisheries building) at 108 Adelaide Terrace. This will provide a one-stop-shop for the community to access information, advice and education resources, and a working base for catchment coordinators and groups to come together. Meeting and training facilities, office space for project work, and computers for community use, will make this a contact point for everyone interested in the Swan and Canning rivers and their catchment.

The emphasis is on people, including network and agency staff, working through the centre and out in the catchment to support projects and raise awareness. Practical assistance will range from advice, to loan of equipment for rehabilitation projects, to help in setting up community group 'homepages' on the Internet so that groups can share information. A management board with strong community representation will make sure the network is responsive to community needs.

Once the centre is open and a network coordinator appointed, it will be back to the community again to get the network functioning through workshops and other activities – how the network operates will depend on how you want to use it.

For more information contact Karen Majer at the Water and Rivers Commission on 278 0353. □



Available from the Swan River Trust unless otherwise stated.

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Reports

- * *Swan River Trust Annual Report 1994-95.*
- * *Action for the Future: The Swan and Canning Rivers Cleanup Program.*
- * *Urban Integrated Catchment Management: A handbook for local government and community groups.* Bryce Bunny & Mike Mouritz, from the Department of Environmental Protection, ph. 221 3840.

Pamphlets

Catchment Management Series

- * No.1, *Upper Canning River Catchment Management Plan.*
- * No.2, *Southern-Wungong River Catchment Management Plan.*
- * No.3, *Ellen Brook Catchment Management Plan.*

Posters

- * *Controlling weeds in waterways and wetlands,* with the Department of Environmental Protection, 1995.

Videos

- * *Living on Groundwater: Part 1: Country WA; Part 2: Urban WA,* Water & Rivers Commission, from the Gould League, ph. 387 6079.



**SWAN
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We've moved! Our new address is:

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Protecting the Swan-Canning River system for the future