Thanks to past generations, we have willow in the Alps. With every hope that they would be an asset, instead some species have proved to be weeds, invading our waterways to bully and dominate what were once diverse ecosystems. Now, at both state and national levels the noxious willow species are now known for what they are – weeds of national significance. This is the era with the impetus and support to do battle, to control these challenging adversaries. What follows is snapshot - a tiny taste of a truly massive amount of work - looking at current willow-work, the challenges, the partnerships and achievements.
Welcome to issue 41 - my first as Alp's program manager. In the short time I’ve been in this position I’m still working to get my head around the scope and depth of what goes on across the Alp’s, knowing my role is partly to help maintain and develop the Program in ways that keep it relevant, effective and engaging.

Front and centre is the engagement of staff at all levels and across all agencies as well as key stakeholders (shown as a group on page 20) at what our neighbouring agencies are doing. Sharing information, collaborating with research, developing new project ideas and using our small budget to implement them is what the program is about. Of course there is the top priority of weed coordination – looking at issues and challenges which don’t worry about borders. Increasing numbers of wild horses, the Hawkweed menace and managing visitors in a sustainable yet positive way are three of these operational challenges. Working side-by-side and engaging our partners and providing the respect they deserve is incredibly important. The valuable report into the status of the Alp’s catchments provided by Alp partners Graeme Worboys, Roger Good and Andy Spate is a great asset to the Alp program. And typical of people who work in the Alp’s, we are never satisfied with our achievements – only two years ago the work in the Alps, the fact that some quite large areas were still willow-free was not widely appreciated. As far as control programs were concerned, “They were so widespread it was almost a case of where do we start?”. As he recalls, up until the 2003 fires, the approach was essentially to focus on specific areas where willows were causing a significant threat to high-value assets, such as the Howqua River and the Baw Baw plateau.

When Charlie Pascoe, Natural Values Program Manager in Parks Victoria’s Alpine District, began work on willows back in 2002, they were widespread and abundant in valleys around many parts of the Alp’s. The fact that some quite large areas were still willow-free was not widely appreciated. As far as control programs were concerned, “They were so widespread it was almost a case of where do we start?” As he recalls, up until the 2003 fires, the approach was essentially to focus on specific areas where willows were causing a significant threat to high-value assets, such as the Howqua River and the Baw Baw plateau. 

Josh Bean, Senior Ranger with the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NSW) is also an expert on pest control. “We’ve been plugging away for decades, removing willow from riparian areas – rivers and creeks where they prefer to grow.” And then several main factors converged to ramp things up: willow gained classification as a nationally significant weed; support funding for willow control was made available by Snowy Hydro Limited; and the 2003 fires triggered a nasty surprise.

Firstly, willow was planted on the weed register at a national level because it was having a significantly negative environmental and biodiversity effect. Activity at both national and state levels has been the follow-on with. In other words, willow is the wanted poster, with the relevant organisations now responsible for its control, something which is taking place seemingly everywhere. The former Snowy Hydro sites in New South Wales are an example... Liz Maples is the rehabilitation officer with the KSNP National Parks & Wildlife Service working in Kosciuszko National Park. “It’s our responsibility to maintain and improve eco-systems for the future, and in terms of willow, our goal is to remove it (and all other woody exotic species) from the upper reaches of Australia’s largest catchment, the top of the Murray Darling Basin.” And while this sounds almost impossible, the brilliant news is that it is soon to be a reality. “To date we’ve treated about 80 kilometres along the Tumut River and a further 50 of the Snowy. Apart from the steepest section, between T2 dam and the Cable Yards at Elliot Way (near Cabramurra), we’re nearly done with the entire initial kill.” The Guthega Road construction site in Kosciuszko National Park: the willows being cut and chipped before sorting.}

THANKS TO THE CMAs

Over the past 10 years staff from Kosciuszko have been working with the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority, the North East Catchment Management Authority, the Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority, the Southern Highlands & Central Tablelands Catchment Management Authority and the Wheatbelt Catchment Management Authority to implement the weed control program.

The response to the weed infestation was swift and a great example of a responsibility shared...
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This target area had been ‘blessed’ with dense plantings of willow thanks to the fact that when the waterways were altered through the engineering of the Snowy River scheme, willow were planted following blasting and earthworks, to help stabilise new banks. Sixty or more years on, and the aim is in some ways the same, to remove the willow, while stabilising the banks. “It’s all about creating new habitats and giving nature a very nasty surprise.”

Following the 2003 fires that burnt over one million hectares of the Victorian high country, a fire recovery project was produced to guide post-fire recovery work. This was a direct response to the fact that alpine bogs are fascinating places – biologically and geomorphologically – but also highly vulnerable. Interestingly, willows did not appear in that the fire recovery plan because they were not con- sidered to pose any particular additional threat following fire. (See the theme song from ‘Jaws’.)

While Parks Victoria’s Elaine Thomas, (Ranger, Bogong Management Unit, Alpine National Park) tells the grim tale, “I work but some one’s got to do it.”

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“Those who’d seen it described it as dense, like the hairs on a dog’s back.” By ‘it’, Elaine is referring to the vision that eventually greaved scientists and park staff. Apparently the willows had altered the bogso significant that during the months which followed, they’d become an ideal germination site for the air-borne seed, probably from those established willows growing downstream in the Kiwa Valley. As Elaine explains, it was very much an Oh-My-Goodness-We-Have-To-Do-Something moment. The response to the weed infestation was swift and a great example of a responsibility shared firstly by Parks Victoria, the North East Catchment Management Authority, volunteer groups and contractors; then several years later, the Depart- ment of Sustainability & Environment, and Melbourne University. “Operating cross-tenure control is all about being able to discuss where control is needed, to work out the priorities together, to keep everyone in touch, and to share and optimise the pooled resources.”

Anyone who took part on site remembers the soft shoe worn, the fertilizer bags full of thousands of seeds, the hand pulled willows. “We estimate that over 355 person days a year was dedicated on willow control with Victorian contractors in 2008/2009.” Which, if you do the maths, means many hands doing the work, as the window of opportunity for control sits between December and April at this elevation. Clearly there may always be willow in the landscape, but equally, there are effective ways to manage it as long as we work in partnership and look at landscapes as a whole. This philosophy is summed up by the fact that the Howqua River catchment in Victoria may be off the willow free, but those involved are smart enough seek the general public’s support to do in any willow that may have been missed in the process.
Horsley.

Ben Phillips, Steve

L-R: Stephen Hughes, Steve Horsley

is essential that we strengthen the degree to the protection of biodiversity I believe it where there is the greatest need. In regard important to give due attention to strategic management outcomes. I think it’s equally functioning team, you will have better land diversity. By the very nature of having a well

are well looked after the flow on is better I work with. If they are well trained and

the Alps program, having been a member of the Alps Program’s Liaison Committee – since 1997. Stephen Hughes’ skill set is the product of diverse roles across the entire spectrum of park management – from inner city town parks to the wilder-

of Namadgi National Park. Stephen Hughes – the former South West Slopes Region - the former South West Slopes Region includes a third of Kosciuszko NP - the former South West Slopes Region included a third of Kosciuszko NP - the former South West Slopes Region included a third of Kosciuszko NP.

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Steve Horsley is not a face at the committee table. Since (joining the NSW National Parks Service in the late nineties, he’s been involved with the Alps Program in various ways including being the New South Wales representative on the Program’s Committee. “It’s a great forum, when he’s unavailable, his place at the ta-

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Curriculum vitae

Program Promotion and Information

Within the Alps Program there is a long list of achievements because here it is – issue 41, and my first as the new program man-

age. There are no surprises here this month. There is in putting these together (luckily I don’t have to do most of it, thanks to our writer and designer team (Dale Fristed and Tom Lemos)). While we plan to continue with posting out hard copies the newsletter is also available online and we hope that a system where people can be put onto an email list, which tells them when the next newsletter is available.

Biography. Reprints — The popular Alps Program brochure (four of them – general Alps brochure, camping, Australian Alps Walking Track and huts guide) have been reprinted and circulated to the various visitor outlets across the Alps.

World heritage. With all three state / territory governments now formally supporting the nomination of the Alps to the tentative World Heritage list the Alps plays a central role in coordinating these submissions. As I write there should still be some way off work is ongoing to get the Alps onto the tentative list.

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esses underlying exotic species invasions by investigating the relationship between soil nutrient resources (which have been identified as a primary driver of weed invasion in Australian natural ecosys-

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Fact sheet. A Climate Change fact sheet has been developed by the Climate Change Reference Group and loaded onto the Alps website

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FACES OF THE ALPS

Despite the fact that the Australian Alps lies across two states and one territory – Victoria, New South Wales and the ACT – since 1996 they’ve been managed as a bi geographical entity. In practice this means that the collection of alpine region national parks and other protected areas is managed collectively. To make this possible, a group of carefully chosen representatives is pulled together to serve on the Australian Alps Liaison Committee. Let’s meet them.

Steve Horsey

With university qualifications in forestry and horticultural science and practical experience in protected area management since 1997, Stephen Hughes’ working life has been divided between the Sydney Snowys and the alpine area. As a career employee of the NSW National Parks Service in the late nineties, he’s been involved in the Alps Program in various ways including being the New South Wales representative on the Program’s Committee. “It’s a great forum, when he’s unavailable, his place at the table is taken by Will McCutcheon. Will’s career with the Victorian State Government has involved working with a range of planning and environmental agencies. In the early 1990s he joined Parks Victoria, moving from Melbourne to East Gippsland in 2007. Currently Will is Chief Ranger of East Gippsland District, working with the team who manage parks from Sale to Mallacoota, and as part of this, managing Snowy River and Errinundra National Parks (soon to be included under the Alps MoU) and supporting management of the eastern extremity of the Alpine National Park.
Committee, his day to day role in Australian Parks Policy & Biodiversity section is wrapped around the complex topic of sharing the benefits that arise from biodiversity and park management. In other words, if your research into biodiversity ultimately generates a profit, then you should pay a small percentage towards protecting the sources of that benefit.

Steve Horsey is not a face at the committee table. Since joining the NSW National Parks Service in the late nineties, he’s been involved in the Alps Program in various ways including being the New South Wales representative on the Program’s Committee. “It’s a great forum, and a good way to gain exposure to a range of people with different experiences – you’re speaking directly with the people who know what’s happening.”
This time, Steve’s role is as the Committee’s convener, and he’s keen to support the Program’s set of topic specific reference groups. “We’re looking at how to make the most of the expertise in each of the reference groups. The amount of time people have available to devote to the Program is finite and to make the most of it we need to look at options, such as project management assistants.”

Steve is well positioned to appreciate the context within which each of the reference groups operate. For ten years he’s worked in a smallish chunk of the Alps - the former South West Slopes Region which included a third of Kosciuszko NP as well as Bimbadgen NP and about 60 smaller reserves. Apart from managing these areas he set up management teams, as new parks were created and annexed. His current role deals with a series of special projects, within the newly amalgamated Southern Ranges Region - some echo the focus of many of the Programs reference groups such as weed management and developing a memorandum of understanding with the regions’ First Peoples.

Australian Alps Traditional Owners Reference Group Meeting. The AATORG met in Tanglewood in November. The Cultural Heritage Reference Group attended the same meeting to discuss the outcomes of the First Peoples Gathering.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Update of the Education Kit. The Alps Education Kit was last updated in 2005 and work is about to commence on updating this valuable resource. One of the intentions will be to make the kit more ‘web friendly’ as well as up with national school curriculum.

25th year recognition. July 4 2011 will mark 25 years since the Alps MoU was first signed. The Stakeholder Communication and Reference Group and the AALC are working on the best way to mark this occasion.

VISITOR EXPERIENCES AND MARKETING

Visitor Experiences Workshop. The Visitor Experience Workshops were held across the Alps in November. The guru in Visitor Experience Management – Frances Gertsch from Parks Canada was brought out to run a series of workshops which were designed to make managers look at the ‘visitor experience’ through the eyes of the visitor. Parks Australia and NSW NPWS have hosted a number of these workshops when she was in Australia. (see article, page 6)

‘Welcome to Country’ totems. Work is underway to produce a series of small totems which acknowledge aboriginal heritage across the Alps. These will be placed at key visitor locations and will present a simple, low cost message to Aboriginal people saying the Alps are a single, continuous landscape.

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WORKS AROUND THE ALPS PROGRAM UPDATE

Program Promotion and Information

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Cultural heritage

Achieving the Aspirations of the 2010 First Peoples Gathering. An important aspect of the First Peoples Gathering in May last year in Jindabyne was to look at ways of improving the involvement of the indigenous people across the Alps and enhancing the Australian Alps Traditional Owners Reference Group (AATORG) profile in the Australian Alps program. To achieve this the Alps program will write a newsletter after each AATORG meeting and circulate to community members across the Alps. The first edition of the ‘Alps Aboriginal News’ was printed and circulated. You will also notice the indigenous Alps logos appearing alongside the logos of our partner agencies on the social media documentation, including this newsletter. In addition, the indigenous Alps logo will soon appear on a new line of stickers.

Water and Catchments

Agency Capacity to Manage River and Catchment Health. The Water and Catchments Reference Group used a survey to gather the thoughts of managers across the Alps on the issues relating to the ongoing management of water and catchments in the Alps. The results were used in the production of a poster which was displayed at the Australian Society of Limnologists (Fresh Water Ecologists) conference held in Thredbo in November. The theme of this poster was the skills needed for the future management of catchments in the Alps.

Natural Resource Management

Feral Horse Impact Assessment.

Research into feral horses continues with a study into the impacts of horses around bogs and waterways using a pre-developed stream index model to determine the level of impacts. Another project which will hopefully commence in the near future is a study into ways of determining the horse density without the need for aerial surveys.
Here’s something you don’t expect to hear from the lips of a visiting expert. “I’ve learnt a tonne. It’s an opportunity to step back from my day to day job and think and to see what other organisations are doing and to reflect on new things I’ve discovered that I can take back to Canada.”

If Frances Gertsch appreciates the perspective gained during her recent time in Australia, she’s also shared a great deal with us – which is no surprise given she was sought out for her particular area of expertise and ability to communicate. At one time a management planner with the national parks in Nunavut (in Canada’s eastern arctic), then manager of visitor services at Parks Canada’s head office in Ottawa, she is currently the Manager of Visitor Experience for Prince Edward Island National Park (which sits in the Gulf of St. Lawrence just north of Nova Scotia).

“Whether in Canada or Australia, managing parks is very much about visitors. Managing visitors well, with the help of a fresh perspective, may very likely be the difference between enjoying a balanced approach, or enduring a grim slog.”

“Facilitating and hosting visitor experience at national parks is a relatively new concept in Canada, perhaps only five years old. Parks Canada saw a drop in visitation. Knowing that parks need to be relevant to be sustainable, we took a step back from our day to day job and think and to see what other organisations are doing and to reflect on new things I’ve discovered that I can take back to Canada.”

“We need to put ourselves in the visitors’ shoes, to see what’s good or what could be better.” The workshops used social science to work with what was known already. As visitors, we’re mostly unaware that when we visit a park our experience is influenced at seven points along the way. We begin by wishing. We then plan and travel. We arrive, visit and depart. And finally we remember the visit. “Using this cycle we can break things down further to discover what, as managers, we’re doing well and where we can improve.”

“This exercise, carried out in part via a field trip, formed the basis of the workshops, and produced a prioritised list of action zones. Those who took part were assigned visitor ‘personas’ – they became grey nomads, people with young families, experience seekers – and wearing their hats they were able to give a depth of feedback that could then help managers facilitate specific elements of experiences to future visitors. “The early section of a journey, Kakadu, Uluru and Booderee national parks in Australia, and truly enjoy the experience, perhaps social networking sites? Or were there little things as a start.”

And the feedback?

“I’m actually feeling a bit energised by the workshop, I’m looking at the details of our web pages in a whole new light.” Rebecca Ghandler, web manager, Parks Australia

“It was fantastic because Frances asked us to put ourselves in the visitors’ shoes – something no-one has ever said to me. On the field trip I saw lots of examples of bad signage that I’d never noticed before. I got more out of it than I thought I would. It was obvious that she knew what she was talking about.” Matt White, ranger, NSW Parks

“I enjoyed it. Frances has a respectful way of challenging us to take off our parks managers’ hats and have us focus on how a visitor sees and experiences our parks.” Ross Grant - Bogong Unit Ranger-in-Charge, Parks Victoria

“I’ve discovered that I can take step back from my day to day job and think and to see what other organisations are doing and to reflect on new things I’ve discovered that I can take back to Canada.”

whether that be by age, gender, origin, expectations, interests, values or (in reality) a combination of all of these. “We can influence how different people appreciate and value a landscape but we need to understand them first to know how best to facilitate that.”

During a whirlwind tour, Frances expanded on this approach through a series of workshops and presentations, not only across the Australian Alps but also to Sydney, Kakadu, Uluru and Booderee national parks. In most locations she carried out workshops that put the how-to-facilitate-visits question in the spotlight.

“The most interesting exercise, carried out partially in a whirlwind tour, Frances expanded on this approach through a series of workshops and presentations, not only across the Australian Alps but also to Sydney, Kakadu, Uluru and Booderee national parks. In most locations she carried out workshops that put the how-to-facilitate-visits question in the spotlight.”

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If Frances Gertsch appreciates the perspective gained during her recent time in Australia, she’s also shared a great deal with us – which is no surprise given she was sought out for her particular area of expertise and ability to communicate. At one time a management planner with the national parks in Nunavut (in Canada’s eastern arctic), then manager of visitor services at Parks Canada’s head office in Ottawa, she is currently the Manager of Visitor Experience for Prince Edward Island National Park (which sits in the Gulf of St. Lawrence just north of Nova Scotia).

Whether in Canada or Australia, managing parks is very much about visitors. Managing visitors well, with the help of a fresh perspective, may very likely be the difference between enjoying a balanced approach, or enduring a grim slog.

“Facilitating and hosting visitor experience at national parks is a relatively new concept in Canada, perhaps only five years old. Parks Canada saw a drop in visitation. Knowing that parks need to be relevant to be sustainable, we took steps to protect parks. When people have a positive experience, they care about these places and will help us sustain them.”

During a whirlwind tour, Frances expanded on this approach through a series of workshops and presentations, not only across the Australian Alps but also to Sydney, Kakadu, Uluru and Floordere national parks. In most locations she carried out workshops that put the how-to-facilitate-visits question in the spotlight.

“We need to put ourselves in the visitors’ shoes, to see what’s good or what could be better.” The workshops used social science to work with what was known already. As visitors, we’re mostly unaware that when we visit a park our experience is influenced at seven points along the cycle. “Were people able to get the photos they were hoping for, which they’ll then send out through social networking sites? Or were there inappropriate souvenirs available?” Or at the berthing stage of the cycle. “Were people wearing their hats they were able to give a depth of feedback that could then help managers facilitate specific elements of experiences to future visitors.”

The early section of a track could be well-signposted, wide and inviting purposeful with how we manage these places and ensuring we take care of all the little things as a start.”

And according to Frances we’ve got good material to work with, to offer a truly extraordinary opportunity for visitors to experience the Australian Alps.

“I’m actually feeling a bit energised by the workshop, I’m looking at the details of our web pages in a whole new light.” Rebecca Gander, web manager, Parks Austraila.

“It was fantastic because Frances asked us to put ourselves in the visitor’s shoes – something no-one has ever said to me. On the field trip I saw lots of examples of bad signage that I’d never noticed before. I got more out of it than I thought I would. It was obvious that she knew what she was talking about.” Matt White, ranger, NSW Parks.

“I enjoyed it. Frances has a respectful way of challenging us to take off our parks managers’ hats and have us focus on how a visitor sees and experiences our parks.” Ross Grant - Bogong Unit Ranger-In-Charge, Parks Victoria.

“I’ve discovered that I can take a fresh perspective, may very likely be the difference between enjoying a balanced approach, or enduring a grim slog.”

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PARKS CANADA WHOLEHEARTEDLY BELIEVES IN FACILITATING AND HOSTING VISITOR EXPERIENCES, BY BEING PURPOSEFUL AND TARGETED IN WHAT IS BEING OFFERED. THE SECRET SEEMS TO BE TO UNDERSTAND THAT EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT WHETHER THAT BE BY AGE, GENDER, ORIGIN, EXPECTATIONS, INTERESTS, VALUES OR (IN REALITY) A COMBINATION OF ALL OF THESE. WE CAN INFLUENCE HOW DIFFERENT PEOPLE APPRECIATE AND VALUE A LANDSCAPE BUT WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THEM FIRST TO KNOW HOW BEST TO FACILITATE THAT.”

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And according to Frances we’ve got good material to work with, to offer a truly extraordinary opportunity for visitors to experience the Australian Alps.
Managing natural landscapes is a complex business, one which keeps most park managers and rangers happily swamped. Anyone new to the field soon learns that there is never a typical day, week, or even season. And that’s due to the variables.

These come in different forms as well as degrees of potential control. For example, careful observation and adaptation may be the best tools in the case of a fire storm, while the spread of weeds can be actively reduced, for example, through educating walkers about why it’s not a good idea to pick the seeds off your socks once you’re deep in the wilderness. Given each area of the Alps has its specific assets and threats, we’re fortunate to have teams of intelligent people who can think on their feet to best protect and manage them.

Take the Wonnangatta Valley in Victoria’s Alpine National Park. According to Ranger Mike Dowler it’s a remote setting that ticks enough boxes to be one of Parks Victoria’s newly launched iconic 4WD adventures. Apart from the obvious attraction to 4WD enthusiasts, Wonnangatta is a mecca for sambar deer hunting, trail bike riding, horse riding, trout fishing and those interested in the Wonnangatta homestead’s European cultural heritage (oh, and the murder mystery). On a long weekend the visitors number in the hundreds and it’s these people - and the way they interact with the landscape – that Mike and a team of others is interested in. Clearly there is a great deal to value here, and it’s everyone’s responsibility to protect and maintain it.

“We work together with others who appreciate the Valley. There are the many families with strong connections to this place who offer support through the Friends of Wonnangatta. We also work in partnership with numerous Four Wheel Drive Clubs affiliated with Four Wheel Drive Victoria, and then there are also our connections with the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria Police and Parks Victoria staff based at Bright, Heyfield and Dargo.”

This combined skill set is impressive - from the protection offered by DSE officers which helps build a diversity of flora and fauna, to the track care carried out by 4WD club members, a lot is achieved. As for Parks Victoria rangers and Victoria Police, their focus is often on the visitors. “We’re equally promoting and protecting. Our aim is for the people who visit to be able to absorb the Valley on all levels: a remote setting where you can set your swag up under the stars; a homestead site rich with European cultural heritage, challenging designated tracks for walkers, 4WD, trail bikes or horses; and a premier location for Sambar deer stalking.”

For the vast majority of visitors, this is the case, thanks to information provided before they arrive. But there will always be issues with a handful of others over camp fire management, littering, respecting the cultural values, bush bashing and illegal hunting methods. Which is why rangers and police, camp alongside to help educate visitors in situ – a tried and true method which gets good results.

Yes the Wonnangatta – like many, many other natural sites – is a complex place to manage. But as Mike puts it, “We need to make sure that the best experiences are offered and that same experiences are available for future park users.”

Wonnangatta was established around the time of the Gold Rush, at the time one of Victoria’s most remote cattle stations, set in a valley accessible only by pack horse. It was an isolated life for the large home-school families who lived there: families that became high country legends through their skill and legendary hospitality but who equally suffered infant mortality and death in childbirth.

By 1914 the station was owned in partnership and managed by a third party – James Barclay, a local cattleman whose wife had died of tuberculous only nine months after they’d married. Perhaps he initially welcomed the isolation, but by 1917 he’d hired John Bamford to cook and do odd jobs. It was war time and men were scarce, so when Barclay was warned that Bamford had a bad temper and was suspected of (but never charged with) strangling his wife, Barclay hired him regardless.

Eight days after Bamford had settled into his new job the two men – Bamford and Barclay – rode into Tallboatville to vote in the referendum on conscription. When later questioned by police, those who’d seen and spoken with the pair described them as cheerful and comfortable in each other’s company. Around the same time Bamford’s best friend and neighbour rode over to Wonnangatta to drop off the mail – there was no-one about. About three weeks later he again rode over to find no-one there and Barlcay’s dog looking distressed. There was no-one about. About three weeks later he again rode over to find no-one there and Barclay’s dog looking distressed and hilt starved. The alarm was raised and a few days later a search of the property uncovered the body and severed head of Barclay, half buried, badly decomposed with evidence that he had been shot in the back. No evidence of Bamford was found at that point though it was noted that a horse was also missing. And while it may not be relevant, later, when reinforcements from Melbourne arrived at the crime scene, as they prepared their first meal in the homestead they seasoned their bacon and eggs from a tin marked pepper, only to watch the eggs turn a strange colour from what was in fact strychnine. Nine months later, following the snow melt, Bamford’s body was also found, shot in the head, under a partly burnt out woodpile, about 12 miles from the homestead near Howitt Hut.

Officially the murder remains unsolved, but with many theories. Perhaps Bamford murdered Barclay and locals handed out their own justice, tracking him down, executing him then attempting to dispose of the evidence in the woodpile? Or, as rumour has it, was Barclay killed by a jealous husband, who was then forced to chase and murder Bamford who may have been a witness? Or perhaps cattle thieves had been stumbled upon by Barclay, signing the fate of both men.
Wonnangatta Valley

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These come in different forms as well as degrees of potential control. For example, careful observation and adaptation may be the best tools in the case of a fire storm, while the spread of weeds can be actively reduced, for example, through educating visitors about why it’s not a good idea to pick the seeds off your socks once you’re deep in the wilderness. Given each area of the Alps has its specific assets and threats, we’re fortunate to have teams of intelligent people who can think on their feet to best protect and manage them.

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If you like unsolved murder mysteries, there’s a fabulous one centred on the Wonnangatta Homestead which is rich in European cultural heritage…
riBBON OF HOPE LENGTHENS

These questions point out the obvious — humans, unwittingly, interfere with wildlife traffic flow. As we busily modify the landscape around us, clearing fields, or constructing unending ribbons of bitumen to speed us on our way, we’re also making it difficult for other species to move around to survive. Unlike us, who find the Hume an ideal way to increase our mobility, many species experience this same road as a barrier, one that prevents them from accessing the habitat they need.

Imagine then, a long ribbon of green, superimposed over the vast sweep of Australia’s eastern coast where many areas of wildlife-friendly-landscape already exist. Imagine this massive wildlife corridor could be made a reality through the creative efforts of many people, keen to pool their experience and expertise.

Happily this is in fact what has been taking place for the past three years. Federal and State governments appreciate the importance of green corridors. Water catchment management authorities, local councils, non-government conservation organisations, community groups, corporate entities and universities are already working in partnership. And the focus of much of this attention is the 2,800 kilometre long Great Eastern Ranges — from the Australian Alps in southern Victoria through to the Atherton Tablelands in Far North Queensland.

Of course, the green spaces within this area are already diverse. However, it is the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative that will create a contiguous corridor, both from low to high altitudes as well as from North to South. It will be a corridor that offers many species the flexibility to move, adapt and therefore survive pressures such as climate change. It’s an initiative which safeguards this diversity into the future.

The New South Wales’ Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water began the Initiative supported by $7 million in crucial funding from the New South Wales Environmental Trust Fund. With Ian Pulsford guiding the project, the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative benefited from his skill in helping to build the key partnerships needed to work in the five focus areas within New South Wales.

The model has proved to be a great one, and in this next year, the responsibility for taking it forward and out across the larger landscape lies outside government hands — as was always the intention — and five lead partners now guiding the process. The initiative’s newly appointed director, with ample non-government conservation experience, is Rob Dunn.

“The approach is not radical — it’s backed by sound science* which states that if you are serious about biodiversity you have to think beyond conservation in national parks. Our parks are under threat from climate change. If they are not buffered and protected, and if we don’t look at connectivity, these parks will become islands in a hostile sea.”

As for the model itself, its success lies in its simplicity. “The partners have local expertise, they know the issues. And while they come from differing perspectives, they appreciate that the solution has to be taken up voluntarily, by people who understand to think beyond tenures, catchments or borders.”

With its profound and simple aim, and its even more common-sense architecture, the Initiative is now being sought out by interested parties in the ACT, Queensland and Victoria. “They see value in the Initiative and the potential for greater outcomes than just the sum of the parts.”

* Connectivity Conservation and the Great Eastern Ranges Corridor: Mackey, Watson and Worboys (available - www.greateasternranges.org.au/)

Q. How does a squirrel glider cross a paddock? A. It uses a paddock tree.

Q. How does the same glider cross the Hume Highway near Holbrook? A. It uses those strange telegraph-like poles set along the verges.

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+ is focused on a contiguous landscape stretching 2,800 kilometres from the Australian Alps in southern Victoria to the Atherton Tablelands and beyond in Far North Queensland;
+ is a massive wildlife corridor which already contains three World Heritage Areas nestled in amongst dozens of national parks and reserves;
+ includes over 8,250 plant species, 26% of which are endemic with rainforests containing the greatest concentration of primitive flowering plants in the world;
+ centres on a landscape which captures the most reliable rainfall in eastern Australia;
+ is the only continental-scale north-south opportunity for conservation linkages over the maximum possible elevation, latitude and climate range;
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Q. How does a squirrel glider cross a paddock? A. It uses a paddock tree. Q. How does the same glider cross the Hume Highway near Holbrook? A. It uses those strange telegraph-like poles set along the verges.
As Dr Margaret Kitchin, Senior Forest Ecologist with ACT Parks points out, “We’ve got this as a resource and we’re going to get as much as we can out of it.” The resource she’s referring to is the body of information being gathered from 40 fire ecology plots set out across the Australian Alps.

These 30 x 30 metre quadrats are much more than a carefully selected series of sites where scientific observations can be made. They are a commitment to an ongoing and growing body of information, precious because, as Margaret puts it so well, “Everyone talks about it, but very few do it”.

Like most good ideas, the fire recovery plots project is a simple one. Any information on how landscapes behave post fire is virtually a tradable currency being collected by these plots, a decision was made to put them in place.

Various agencies across the Alps stepped forward in June 1997 for the set up phase, each one of the 40 plots being carefully selected to make the maximum potential contribution to what will, in time, form an endless river of information. Ignoring state boundaries, the quadrats mark areas of differing communities of vegetation – sub-alpine snow gum woodlands; tall gum, Alpine Ash and montane mixed gum forests; dry valley mixed open forests and woodlands – from Namadgi in the ACT through to the Alpine National Park in Victoria. Factored in was the need for each plot to burn, as the whole point is to see how each behaves immediately after a fire, and then at yearly intervals over the following five years.

As a forecaster, Margaret explains the project will achieve what it was intended to. “It will turn up as many questions as it answers. It will help inform management of the effects of fire on vegetation, for instance, how frequently they should put fire into a landscape as a prescribed burn based on how quickly various species are known to recover.”

The analysis is currently underway and a final report will follow in June next year. Like most good projects, it looks to turn up as many questions as it answers. But as Margaret explains, the project will achieve what it was intended to. “It will help inform management of the effects of fire on vegetation, for instance, how frequently they should put fire into a landscape as a prescribed burn based on how quickly various species are known to recover.”

The plots are now in a resting phase, waiting for the next fire event to trigger a new cycle of monitoring and data building. But even in this moment they continue to prove useful. “Fire ecologists are aware of interesting developments – in flowers and fruiting of slow maturing shrubs – seven to eight years after a fire, so we’re going back.”

As Dave Darlington steps down from his role as the New South Wales representative on the Alps Liaison Committee, something becomes very clear. He’s been a significant part of the committee for over two decades, or to put it another way, no-one has put in more time than Dave Darlington.

Clearly Dave recognised, back in the early 90s, that the committee was an effective means to have influence and input. So the committee benefitted by having Dave as a member, (as well as having him put his hand up at least twice for the role of convenor). His great depth of knowledge, gleaned from his role as a ranger in the mid 60s came from the ground-up, forever informing his current role as a senior manager. This has meant that he has a strong focus on practical aspects in the field which in turn has meant that the Alps Program has an equally strong field focus on practical outcomes. No surprises then that Dave has made his contribution towards straightforward cross-border management of the Alps.

And the list goes on. He’s a great reader of the political landscape which has helped guide the committee’s dealings with the sensitive issues which surround issues such as wild dogs, feral horses and the National Heritage Listing. He’s involved in fire ecology and the landscape being heavily involved in fire management and recovery, balancing science and community. Dave is committed to First People’s involvement in the Alps Program supported by relationships built on respect. And this respect carries over to his staff who also hold him in high regard for being approachable, encouraging and supportive.

The Alps Committee will miss Dave for all these reasons; and for the same reasons we’re all lucky to have him carry on in his day job. Thanks Dave.
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Like most good ideas, the fire recovery plots project is a simple one. Any information on how landscapes behave post fire is virtually a tradable currency amongst those who want to better understand these dynamic landscapes. And since so many people – such as scientists and natural resource managers – will benefit from the feedback provided by these plots, a decision was made to put them in place.

Various agencies across the Alps stepped forward in June 1997 for the set up phase, each one of the 40 plots being carefully selected to make the maximum potential contribution to what will, in time, form an endless river of information. Ignoring state boundaries, the quadrats mark areas of differing communities of vegetation – sub-alpine snow gum woodlands; tall gum, Alpine Ash and montane mixed gum forests; dry valley mixed open forests and woodlands - from Namadgi in the ACT through to the Alpine National Park in Victoria. Factored in was the need for each plot to burn, as the whole point is to see how each behaves immediately after a fire, and then at yearly intervals over the following five years.

“...it was a big commitment to set it up, and also to go back each year for the data collection, with a minimum of two people in the field, taking three hours to assess each plot as well as time to enter the data at home.”

In 2003 fire swept through almost all the plots, triggering the planned monitoring process. Teams were quickly on site post fire to photograph and record as per the protocols set out by the project, and the process was then repeated over the next five years. In 2009, with all the data in, Margaret who is currently custodian of the data and manager of the project has been working together with the Australian National University, tidying things up and checking for consistency.

The analysis is currently underway and a final report will follow in June next year. Like most good projects, it looks to turn up as many questions as it answers. But as Margaret explains, the project will achieve what it was intended to: “It will help inform management of the effects of fire on vegetation, for instance, how frequently they should put fire into a landscape as a prescribed burn based on how quickly various species are known to recover.”

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Last summer, Dr Matthew Brookhouse drove from Mount Buller to Wangaratta to buy a list full of pruning saws, something he tends to do quite often given his line of work. And that’s because he quickly destroys each saw, cutting through the dead trunks of a species that happens to grow in alpine granite boulder fields.

Matthew is a scientist, based at the Australian National University in Canberra, whose particular interest in this instance is *Podocarpus lawrencei* (the Mountain Plum Pine). Together with Keith Mc Dougall (botanist with the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water), he has been collecting samples – around 700 to date – to be analysed for their potential treasure-trove of information. Given the majority scientific community view is that there is a strong relationship between climate and tree-ring width, gathering samples offers a view back in time – of climate and major fire events from four to six hundred years ago.

Which is why around this time last year, Matthew and Keith spent days in the field collecting samples, blunting blade after blade as sections of dead stems – ideally 15cm in diameter – were gathered from all over the Alps: around Mt Buller, Mt Hotham, Mt Buffalo, Mt Buffalo, Mt Hotham, Mt Loch, the Bogong High Plains, the Cobberas, Mt Jagungal, Bimberi Peak, and the Brindabellas.

With the samples in hand, the next step has been their processing to gather priceless information. For this species growing at these elevations, the belief is that the width of each ring is a response to various factors lumped under the term climate – such as temperature or snow depth. And while assessing ring width may seem a straightforward method, it is also laborious and slow. The truth is, dendrochronologists like Keith and Matthew come down out of the mountains to become French polishers.

Yes, each sample is being sanded by hand, working down from 60-grit paper to the fine3200 grade. “We sand to a point that is the equivalent of French polishing, smooth as a mirror so that the light reflects off it quite well.”

The point of all this effort is profound. Data gathered in this way could give us a comparison point for what we observe in these alpine landscapes today. “It separates out the short term noise and longer term trends. It takes climate assessment out of the realm of gut feeling and into observable fact.” Work like this produces an informed picture of what has happened and what is really happening now.

For example, a major fire event will trigger a mass post-fire germination. “We’re seeing evidence of such an event in the existence of the possums – both in terms of food and shelter. Following the possums’ feasting on the seasonal migration of moths, the plum pines fruit, and it’s these which stop up the possums fat stores which carry them through the leaner winter months. As well as this, the form of the Plum Pine helps to hold a covering of snow over the boulder fields. The possums sleep for much of the colder months, but they benefit from the air space beneath the pines which sits at a fairly constant two degrees Celsius.”

In case you didn’t know...

The Mountain Plum Pine, the Mountain Pygmy Possum and the Bogong Moth are caught up in their own dance of diversity. The current view is that the Plum Pine plays a key role in the existence of the possums – both in terms of food and shelter. Following the possums’ feasting on the seasonal migration of moths, the plum pines fruit, and it’s these which stop up the possums fat stores which carry them through the leaner winter months. As well as this, the form of the Plum Pine helps to hold a covering of snow over the boulder fields. The possums sleep for much of the colder months, but they benefit from the air space beneath the pines which sits at a fairly constant two degrees Celsius.

Rod Oldfield, a friend and colleague who worked with Alps staff in NSW and Victoria died tragically on October 7th in a paragliding accident in Bright, Victoria.

Rod worked for Kosciuszko National Park, at both the entrance stations, the Visitor Centre and also as a compliance officer before moving to Porepunkah where he started work with Parks Victoria at the Mt Buffalo National Park entrance station in 2004. Rod worked to support his passions, and he’d moved to the Bright area to continue his paragliding. Janny, Rod’s partner, followed Rod to the area soon after and also took up employment with Parks Victoria.

Rod was a skilled paraglider pilot, well known and highly regarded amongst the close knit paragliding fraternity, both for his flying skills and irreverent sense of fun. Rod was full of stories and jokes (some true, some made up, and often bawdy) and always kept his colleagues and friends entertained. Rod’s memorial service was held in Bright at the paragliders ‘camp’ where family, friends and colleagues shared stories about Rod’s life; many gaining a deeper appreciation of what made him special, his passion, love of life, family and friends. A fitting tribute to a man of true character.

Rod had a great love of adventure, especially in the mountains where he enjoyed bushwalking, kayaking and camping along the Snowy River, mountain biking and his paragliding, and in Janny’s own words, “He was a kind, gentle man who always preferred honesty and simplicity to an unnecessary ‘show’, except, of course, when it came to a good joke or his cars!”

His love of trekking took him and Janny to some far-away places such as Nepal, Laos, and Thailand. Following Rod’s death, Janny completed the trip they had planned together to New Zealand to do the Milford and Routeburn Tracks.

Rod is survived by his partner Janny, his daughters Dan and Kim and Janny’s daughter Amanda.
Last summer, Dr Matthew Brookhouse drove from Mount Buller to Wangaratta to buy a list full of pruning saws, something he tends to do quite often given his line of work. And that’s because he quickly destroys each saw, cutting through the dead trunks of a species that happens to grow in alpine granite boulder fields.

Matthew is a scientist, based at the Australian National University in Canberra, whose particular interest in this instance is Podocarpus lawrencei (the Mountain Plum Pine). Together with Keith McDougall (botanist with the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water), he has been collecting samples – around 700 to date – to be analysed for their potential to provide data on climate and tree-ring width, gathering samples offers a view back in time – of climate and major fire events from four to six hundred years ago.

Which is why around this time last year, Matthew and Keith spent days in the field collecting samples, blunting blade after blade as sections of dead stems – ideally 15cm in diameter – were gathered from all over the Alps: around Mt Buller, Mt Howitt, Mt Buffalo, Mt Hotham, Mt Loch, the Bogong High Plains, the Cobberas, Mt Jagungal, Bimberi Peak, and the Brindabellas.

With the samples in hand, the next step has been their processing to gather priceless information. For this species growing at these elevations, the belief is that the width of each ring is a response to various factors lumped under the term climate – such as temperature or snow depth. While analysing and knowing that each ring is a response to various factors lumped under the term climate – such as temperature or snow depth.

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Matthew.brookhouse@anu.edu.au

For more information, contact Matthew Brookhouse matthew.brookhouse@anu.edu.au

The dead stems of Podocarpus lawrencei: Sampling in Mt Buller. Podocarpus lawrencei fruit.
making the Alps

Dr Vince Morand’s connection to the Australian Alps goes back about 160 million years. As a senior geologist with Geoscience Victoria, (which sits within the Department of Primary Industries), he has a better grasp than most of the likely scenario of events which created the alpine landscape we’re familiar with today.

We have this greater understanding, thanks to geologists like Vince. These people go out into the field to gather samples as part of mapping projects. Or they may spend time in laboratories heating rocks to melting point to study their behaviour. Or they enter data to generate models that produce scenarios which can be studied within human time frames.

From these activities (and many more), we have an idea of how the Australian Alps were formed, and as it always seems to be the case, Gondwanaland is a good place to begin.

The majority view is that about 160 million years ago, a super continent—Gondwanaland—consisting of South America, Africa, Antarctica, India, New Zealand and Australia began to break apart. A single land mass surrounded by ocean, it began to break into sections and these moved away from Antarctica and from each other.

While this is not necessarily new news to many, the underlying process is probably not that well publicised. “The earth’s upper rocky layer—the lithosphere—is about 150 kilometres thick, floating on a layer known as the asthenosphere. About 550 kilometres thick, the asthenosphere is a very fluid thick, like viscous honey.”

Vince goes on to explain that within this layer, there is movement—an impossibly slow-to-imagine connection: ‘boil’. It’s this force that theorists believe powered the Gondwanaland break-up, and continues to have influence to present day. Under Gondwanaland’s lithosphere, a pulse of hot material from the asthenosphere (magma) would reach up, heating the lithosphere’s rocky crust. At this point, two things happened: the rock would expand and, in its expanded form being lighter (same mass but taking up a greater volume), it would float higher on the asthenosphere below it, thus causing the flat low-lying surface of the continent to be raised up along the region that was to become the Australian Alps.

In our case, around 100 million years ago these uplifted plains were pulled apart to form a rift valley—the sticky asthenosphere exerting its force, steadily widening the rift valley until, in the case of the eastern coast of Australia, it broke apart forming Zealandia, a ‘new’ continent.

“At that point, eighty million years ago, Zealandia was above sea level, but now it sits mostly submerged to the east with only New Caledonia, New Zealand and a handful of small islands sitting above ocean level.”

This theory is supported by looking closely at the form of the Australian Alps. As Vince notes, our Alps are very different from the rugged peaks for example, of the active Andes of our Gondwanaland cousin, South America. Instead, the Australian Alps are described by geologists as passive margin ranges, formed along the edge of the rift valley, as sections of crust were dropped down along faults and newly formed watercourses eroded steep valleys as they flowed towards the sea.

Together this has produced a quite different alpine horizon, one where it’s difficult to determine the highest peak from amongst a series of plateaus broken by deep ravines. “Looking at the shape of the Australian Alps is like looking at a series of plateaus. Mount Bogong, the highest peak in Victoria for example, has a flat top with steep valleys all around—it’s essentially an uplifted plain.”

So when you next survey the alpine landscape, take a moment to think of that now extinct rift–ridge, running along the sea–bed in the midst of the Tasman Sea, which played a key role in the formation of our passive margin mountains.

You have to respect those who doggedly work to out–fox canid pests—in this case controlling the populations of wild dogs and foxes in the Alps. And that respect ramps up when you begin to appreciate both the complexities involved and the creativity needed to deal with them...

No one questions the negative impact of foxes on wildlife and lambs, and wild dogs on livestock. Controlling numbers is part of the park managers’ standard brief with various means at their disposal, among them: aerial baiting, ground baiting and soft jade trapping. Then in 2006, trials began on the M-44 ejector, a method imported from the United States Department of Agriculture which has used ejector devices in a number of forms since the mid 1930s. Four trial years later, Rob Hunt (Department of Environment & Climate Change at Queanbeyan) is something of an expert.

“Ejectors save on labour and help make our limited resources go further. Control can be maintained with only 12 visits a year which means that we can now look at strengthening or extending our current control programs.”

What is known— from studying the traffic recorded in sand-plots before and after using the ejectors—is that the method has proved up to 93% effective with foxes and between 80 and 85% with wild dogs.

However Rob wouldn’t like anyone think that ejectors should be used as the only means of control. Like most aspects of managing a living landscape, nothing is as simple as it seems and with fox and wild dog control, an holistic, informed and flexible approach is needed.

To begin with, it’s good to take a nil tenure approach—taking the focus off boundaries and identifying the impact zones and likely areas where foxes or wild dogs need to be controlled before they cause problems. Once we’ve mapped out the assets at risk—whether they be threatened native species or domestic livestock—we can work out the best strategy to reduce the impact on that particular asset. In the case of domestic stock, livestock guarding animals—llamas, donkeys and maresma dogs—may be the first line of defence before employing any one, or a combination of, the baiting methods. For example, there are situations where the ejectors initially control foxes, and then some of the dogs. But as some wild dogs can be particularly wary we rely on experienced trappers to pick up what the ejectors and baits have left behind.

This means valuable trapper time is better spent setting traps for wild dogs rather than foxes.

The ejector trial is virtually complete, with the Invasive Animals Co-operative Research Centre now collating research results from across Australia. This will form part of an ejector registration package to the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, the body responsible for issuing both the temporary and after using the ejectors— is that the method has proved up to 93% effective with foxes and between 80 and 85% with wild dogs.

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For more information, contact Rob Hunt: rob.hunt@environment.nsw.gov.au or visit the Invasive Animals Co-operative Research Centre’s web site: www.invasiveanimals.com.

100 million years ago

130 million years ago

80 million years ago

present
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“Dogs and foxes gape over the top of the baited ejector head,” says Rob, “so that when you begin to appreciate the traffic recorded in sand-plots before and after using the ejectors – is that the method has proved up to 93% effective with foxes and between 80 and 85% with wild dogs.

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MAKing THE ALPS

130 million years ago

100 million years ago

80 million years ago

16

17
We also discuss how we can carry out joint fire mitigation activities such as fuel reduction burning programs.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this year’s keynote speaker not only spoke of this collaborative approach, but his actual role reflects it. Craig Lapsley is the Fire Commissioner for Victoria, a new position formed post the Victorian Royal Commission to make the most of the State’s fire management resources - the Department of Sustainability & Environment, the Country Fire Authority and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. “Craig spoke of co-operative fire management, of the need to work together, or building interoperability between services.” The format and approach may seem obvious - getting the right people together and giving them the chance to throw in the best ideas - and along the border it works, and it’s been working like that for over more than 20 years.

Fire is oblivious of state boundaries. Which is why effective fire management depends on being able to think beyond the lines on a map. It’s also about refreshing your knowledge of cross border operational methods and establishing the working relationships at the beginning of each fire season, something the Eastern and Upper Murray Cross Border Bushfires Operations meetings are all about.

As always, it was worth the effort to be there, with both Committees meeting together for the first time in more than 10 years. In all, more than 60 fire managers from NSW and Victorian land management and fire agencies came together in Jindabyne - bringing together fire specialists from the coast to as far inland as Albury. They were joined by their ACT equivalents who have just as much to gain from cross border co-operation.

In recent times there’ve been many instances where fires have crossed or threatened to cross the NSW and Victorian border, and during three seasons in particular - the 2002-3, the 2006-7 and the 2009-10 seasons - crews from one state spent long periods working together along the border. Ian Dicker (Senior Ranger Fire, Southern Ranges region, NSW Parks) explains how the conference aims to support these efforts.

“One of the major reasons for these meetings is to meet one another, to establish working relationships. It is always better to already know who people are when you come in to a fire operation. It’s also about reviewing our operational guidelines, some of which differ in each state.”

Being familiar with the way others work is key. Each year, the previous fire season is reviewed so that lessons learnt can be discussed and if necessary, changes made to the operational guidelines and signed off. “In the event of a fire we can then quickly refer to and implement the procedures – which cover how the agencies will manage public information and warnings, mapping, communications, makeup of the incident management team, aviation, fatigue management and the location of incident control centres.”

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29 March
Australian Alps Liaison Committee meeting in Canberra

May
Next Australian Alps Traditional Owners Reference Group Meeting in Canberra

9 – 10 May

May / June
First ever proposed Field Days for Operational Staff: a gathering of field based staff across the Alps to look at best practice in weed and pest management – stay tuned for more details

Late May / June
Australian Alps Liaison Committee and Alps Operational Group meeting to discuss next years program and budget

Eucumbene River, Kosciuszko National Park. Photo Stuart Cohen