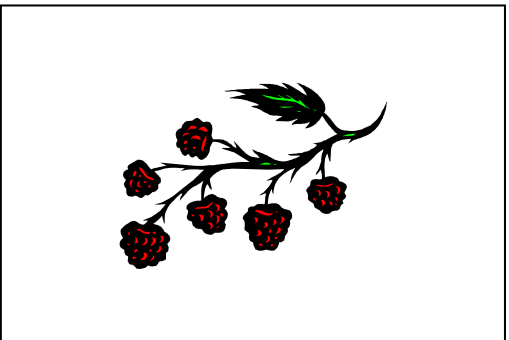


Bushcare Procedures Manual

October 2002



Blue Mountains
City Council



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DEFINITIONS

Blue Mountains Bushcare: the program run by Blue Mountains City Council to facilitate the involvement of volunteers in the management of natural areas under its care and control.

Blue Mountains Bushcare Network: coalition of representatives from Bushcare groups, Landcare groups, other authorities, and individuals interested in maintaining and restoring the integrity of bushland in the Blue Mountains. Provides a forum to exchange ideas and information, comment on issues, or initiate strategies. Facilitated communication between the group and Council.

Bushcare: the involvement of volunteers in the management of natural areas, usually on public land.

Bushcare group: group of volunteers undertaking bush regeneration and/or associated works within an agreed framework on land owned or managed by Council.

Bushcare Officer: Appropriately qualified Council staff member who is employed to develop and implement the Bushcare program and act as project officer for a number of Bushcare groups.

Council: the Council of the City of Blue Mountains.

Council land: land that is either owned by, or under the care control and management of Blue Mountains City Council.

Group coordinator: volunteer who acts as contact person, coordinator for each group.

Log book: book issued to volunteer groups for the purpose of recording the hours worked, the people who participated and the type of work carried out on a Bushcare site.

Site strategy: works program for a Bushcare site, developed by Council in consultation with the relevant Bushcare group, setting out what works are required and how and when they should be undertaken.

Work session: occasion where members of a Bushcare group carry out work on their site. Usually at the same time each month.

INTRODUCTION

During the last few decades there has been increasing recognition of the severity of the problems facing bushland in developed areas nationwide. At the same time methods of regenerating degraded bushland have been developed and refined. There has also been a growing appreciation of the role landholders and local residents can play in combating land degradation issues, as evidenced by the increasing interest in programs such as Landcare and Coastcare.

The situation in the Blue Mountains reflects this, with bushland of extraordinary quality and diversity, but much of it under threat from the pressures associated with some of our landuse practices. These include clearing, fragmentation of bushland remnants, urban runoff, proliferation of exotic plants and animals and altered fire regimes. These problems are often exacerbated by local development patterns encompassing narrow bands of urbanisation along ridgelines. This creates an extensive “impact zone” between the bush and development. Fortunately there is a high level of awareness of these issues among local residents and a willingness to become actively involved in dealing with them.

Blue Mountains City Council as a land manager, recognises the importance of protecting and preserving the area’s natural assets, and the crucial role that community involvement can play in this. It has become clear that if bushland is to be retained close to where we live and work there needs to be a shift in management approaches and community attitudes. The Bushcare program helps to facilitate this process. The Bushcare program is developing as an efficient and effective means of natural systems management. It aims to form an effective defense against the spread of environmental weeds and maintenance of biodiversity through site remediation.

The continuity of work is crucial to the long-term success of a bush regeneration project. Bushcare groups are a primary way in which such continuity can be achieved. Continued support from Council is usually required to assist the volunteers to maintain community interest and to develop the greater potential that exists in the community for direct action.

The benefits of the Bushcare program are:

- Environmental – conservation and restoration of native flora and fauna and preservation of remnant bushland, including the active management and preservation of biodiversity.
- Social – creating closer ties within a community through increased social interaction and sharing of information, enhanced aesthetic values of the environment and personal satisfaction for the individual volunteer.
- Educational – increased awareness in the community about the environment and how people can help, which will be fed back into the wider community. This creates a stewardship approach to public bushland, *sharing* the responsibility between Council and the community.



- Monitoring – regular observations by local residents of changes occurring in the reserve can provide useful information on flora and fauna and can also allow for a quick response when urgent action is required.
- Communication - a pathway for community views to be effectively fed back into Council, reducing traditional adversarial approaches to the resolution of disputes and allowing for the development and implementation of management strategies that have strong community commitment and content.
- Economic – financial savings gained by Council using a volunteer work force and the increased funding accessed through external grants. An additional economic factor is the maintenance of the natural scenic qualities of the Blue Mountains upon which the local economy depends.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the Bushcare program is:

“To promote ecologically sound management of bushland within the City of Blue Mountains by fostering a sense of community responsibility for the natural environment and supporting community direct action to restore natural systems.”

The objectives for Council’s Bushcare program are:

1. Support Bushcare groups to function on a regular basis and produce positive environmental outcomes.
2. Raise community awareness about environmental weeds and the impacts of living near the bush.
3. Increase the community capacity to achieve positive environmental outcomes.
4. Foster a sense of community responsibility for the natural environment.
5. Support for community development and the Blue Mountains Bushcare Network.
6. Obtain external funding and manage grant projects.
7. Share resources between Council and other organisations.
8. Create and maintain self sustaining native plant communities and habitats.
9. Improve the effectiveness of bushland management in the Blue Mountains by complementing the bush regeneration projects undertaken by Council and other agencies.
10. Improve the quality of community life through increased social interaction and sharing of information.

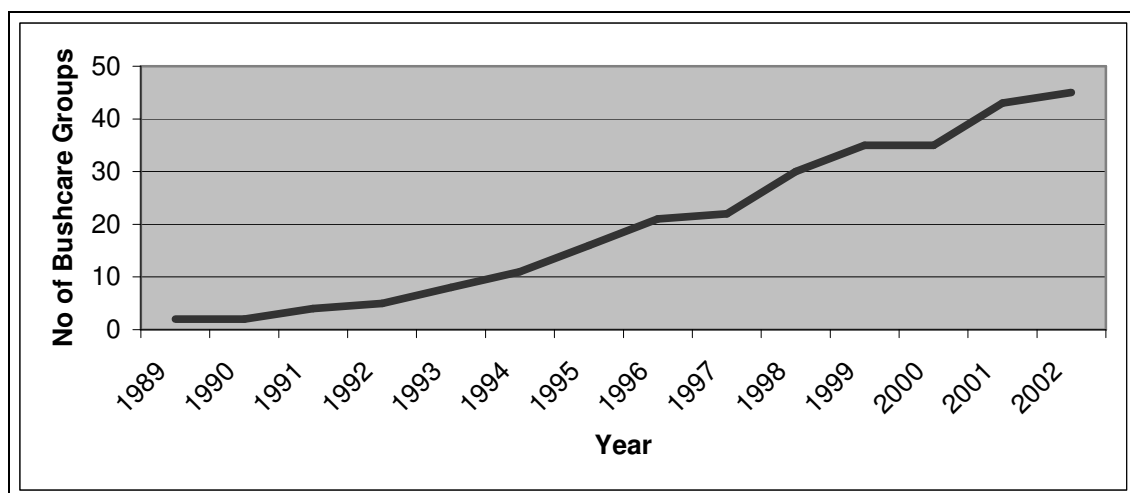
Background

The Bushcare program in the Blue Mountains had its origins in the activities of the early landcare groups. In response to these early community activities Council, in 1992, decided to fund a position to coordinate the activities of these groups. The number of groups steadily increased, reaching 22 groups by 1996. During 1995, a second position was created to assist the development and resourcing of existing groups.

The program continued to expand, with eight more groups seeking support by the end of 1997. During this time Council agreed to provide extra resources to Bushcare, which allowed the employment of two part-time Bushcare Officers. The objective of the Environmental Management Business Plan 1997/98 to establish eight more groups was achieved.

As at 2002, there are **45** Bushcare groups active in the Blue Mountains. Figure 1 shows the growth in the number of Bushcare groups over time.

Figure 1: The increase in numbers of bushcare groups over time



STARTING A GROUP

Council priorities for resourcing groups / projects



Council has limited resources available for the Bushcare program but must ensure that groups receive support on an equitable basis, and that projects are successful. Council's capacity to support Bushcare groups is linked to funding levels, and the number of staff available to attend workdays and manage Bushcare projects.

As resources permit, Council will support all Bushcare projects that comply with criteria set out in this policy. If resources are insufficient, projects will receive support according to the following factors:

- Status and ownership of land (projects on Council land classified for community use would normally receive preference over projects on other classifications such as operational or road reserve);
- Potential of the project to meet its aims and achieve sustainable results (this may depend on the number of people wishing to be part of the group, and the amount of time they are able to commit);
- Potential ecological, educational or other benefits of the project;
- Consistency of the project with local and regional priorities; and
- When the group is available to meet (weekend versus midweek) and Council resources are available at the corresponding time.

Procedure for setting up of new groups

- Prospective volunteers contact Council and discuss the possibility of forming a new Bushcare group. Information on Council's Bushcare program, including a copy of this procedures manual is made available to prospective volunteers.
- Council checks land tenure and other relevant information to ensure that the land the group wants to work on is owned and / or managed by Council.
- Council checks whether adequate resources are available to support the new group, including officers to attend workdays at a time that is convenient to the group.
- Site inspection takes place with volunteers and bush management staff to discuss the nature of problems on site and possible strategies.
- A Council Bushcare Officer is appointed as Bushcare Officer to attend workdays and provide equipment for daily use.
- The Manager delegated to be responsible for Council's Bushland approves the group's application. The new groups details are placed on Council's list of Bushcare groups for public use. Workdays are scheduled on the timetable for Bushcare group workdays. The Blue Mountains Bushcare Network is notified.
- A voluntary group Coordinator or Coordinators is appointed by the group to liaise between Council and the group, and to act as the main contact for the general public.
- Council produces a site strategy in consultation with the group
- The local community is notified - usually by letterbox drop and \ or local media.
- A public meeting is held - usually on site, for the purpose of recruiting new volunteers, raising issues and negotiating outcomes.
- Volunteers are given Bushcare training (also see training section).
- Volunteers are issued with equipment once they have completed training.

Where bushcare groups can work

Bushcare groups undertake restoration on land that is owned or managed by Council. The land is generally classified as community land, regional open space, or public recreation reserve.

With special approval, some groups work on other Council land such as operational land, road reserves or other land categories outside those listed above. Groups working in these areas recognise the continued activities are subject to changes in the intended land use by Council.

Sites for bushland regeneration may be identified for consideration as a Bushcare group by Council professionals or proposed by interested community members.

Suitable sites for consideration are where:

- There is environmental value in conserving and regenerating the area. This may exclude badly degraded sites or sites where fire hazard reduction is the only consideration. However, sites may have a priority for hazard reduction using bush regeneration principles;
- Bush regeneration is achievable by volunteers;
- All volunteers have the common aim of bush regeneration and agreed achievable goals;
- There is a high level of commitment to the site by the local community, with the site likely to be maintained by the volunteer group for a minimum of five years; and
- Council has sufficient resources to allocate a Bushcare Officer to the group.

EXPECTATIONS OF VOLUNTEERS AND COUNCIL

What is expected of Council

A Council officer (referred to as the Bushcare Officer) will be appointed to each Bushcare group. Whenever possible the Bushcare Officer will attend the group's work sessions.

Group supervision and support

The Bushcare program maintains a high level of supervision and support for Bushcare groups. Most groups receive full session supervision and training, tools and other materials, green waste management and grant administration. This high level of supervision provides for:

- Consistent technical guidance;
- Ensuring compliance with safe working practices and adherence to Management Plans;
- Maintaining a positive working relationship between the group and Council; and
- The ability to direct and prioritise work for the site to achieve optimum on-the-ground results.

Council, through the Bushcare Officer, will provide:

Supervision / direction

- Clearly stated roles and responsibilities for volunteers and Council staff;
- Clearly stated channels of communication between the volunteer and Council;
- Follow equal employment opportunity requirements; and
- Appropriate recognition for the contributions made by volunteers.

Training

- Adequate training and direction for volunteers so that they can carry out their work safely and effectively, and comply with relevant legislation such as the *Occupational Health and Safety Act, 2000*; and
- Opportunities for volunteers to develop new skills and knowledge.

Planning

- Consultation with the group whenever possible about any works proposed for the reserve or in its surrounding proximity. This would include fire mitigation, noxious weed spraying, track construction, drainage works etc.
- Coordination of activities on a broader scale, so that they are compatible with local and regional priorities and with goals and aims of appropriate organisations such as the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Sydney Catchment Authority and Landcare;
- Site strategies (to be developed in consultation with each Bushcare group) which define the nature and extent of works required on each Bushcare site and give detailed guidance about how they should be undertaken;
- Advising on appropriate tasks for each work session in accordance with the site strategy; and
- Ongoing site monitoring with the assistance of the Bushcare group.

Tools and equipment

- Supply and maintain appropriate tools, equipment and materials; and
- Arranging for the supply of new or replacement equipment as required, including first aid materials.

Communication / facilitation

- Opportunities for volunteer input into Council's bushland management policies and works programming;
- Consideration of the impacts of Council decisions and operations on volunteer projects;
- Information about Council activities that are relevant to the Bushcare sites; and
- Equity and continuity of support from Council for all Bushcare groups which operate in accordance with the guidelines set out in this procedures manual.

Risk management

- Insurance cover while performing agreed volunteer duties under Council direction;
- Ensuring relevant Council policies and procedures are implemented during work sessions; and
- Ensuring that designated work is appropriate for individual volunteers' abilities and interests.

Grants

- The application for and management of external grants on behalf of the Bushcare group, with possible assistance from the group.

Additional services

- Arranging for the supply of additional services such as rubbish removal, chain sawing and chipping of weed material, as needed.

What is expected of volunteers

- Participation in the preparation of and implementation of site strategies;
- Adherence with relevant legislation, policies and procedures;
- Commitment to carry out their duties in a safe and responsible way;
- Cooperation with Council staff and other volunteers as appropriate;
- Promotion of the aims and the outcomes of the Bushcare program as appropriate;
- Notification of Council of any activities proposed to be undertaken by the Bushcare group;
- Follow the directions of Council staff and the site strategies;
- Attend required training for level of action to be undertaken;
- Undertake all activities in a safe manner; and
- Immediately report any injuries.

Authority to work on Council land as a Bushcare volunteer is conditional on the volunteer complying with Council's Bushcare procedures. If Council determines that a volunteer has acted contrary to these procedures, their authority to work on Council land will be withdrawn.

Everyone in the community has something to contribute and is encouraged to get involved. A range of activities are available within Bushcare to enable participation by all.

The additional role of the group coordinator

A member of each Bushcare group will be appointed by the group to act as Coordinator. The role can be shared if the group wishes, provided it is clear who the primary contact person is.

The Group Coordinator is responsible for:

- Acting as the group's primary contact for Council, other organisations and the general public;
- Facilitating liaison between the group members and Council;
- Notifying the Bushcare officer of any relevant information that they are aware of, eg. potential safety hazards, plans to change the date of a work session, the need for extra equipment;
- Maintaining the group's log book;
- Ensuring the group's first aid kit is available when needed and notifying the Bushcare Officer when items need replacing; and
- Assisting with the recruitment of new group members.

Volunteers taking on additional responsibilities

Sometimes it may be appropriate for members of the group to take on additional supervisory and coordinating responsibilities. It may not be possible for the group coordinator to attend whenever the group is working, and members of the group may be capable of and willing to take on extra responsibilities.

If an agreement is reached between the Bushcare Officer and the group coordinator, the group coordinator may also take on some of the duties that are normally the role of the Bushcare Officer, such as directing work on site and inducting and supervising occasional volunteers. The group coordinator will be covered by Council's insurance policy when working in this role.

The stewardship role of Bushcare groups

It is recognised that Bushcare groups act as reserve stewards, often having had a long association with the site and spending many hours in its care. This means that the group will be consulted and involved whenever possible in any planning for future works that may impact upon the reserve. This will take place either via the Bushcare Officer or directly from the relevant project manager. The groups may also bring to the attention of Council, any activity that they witness having an adverse impact on the reserve or within its proximity.

Out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers

Wherever possible the cost of Bushcare will be covered by Council, via the Bushcare Officer. However, in cases where a volunteer may accrue approved expenses on behalf of Council and the Bushcare group, any "out-of-pocket" expenses will be reimbursed by Council. This may include phone calls, stationery and postage. The following procedure outlines below:

- Prior to accruing any expenses the volunteer must first confirm the proposed expense and its estimated value with the Bushcare Officer.
- Receipts for all expenses must be kept and presented to Council for reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses.
- A maximum of \$100 will be reimbursed, and anything over \$50 will be reimbursed by cheque.

Grievance procedure

If volunteers or volunteer groups have any grievance associated with the operation of the Bushcare program, an attempt should be made to resolve the grievance with the Bushcare Officer in the first instance. This should include clearly outlining the grievance in writing, and allowing the Bushcare Officer 10 days to respond.

If the grievance has not been satisfactorily resolved, the volunteer / group should contact the Manager, Civil Operations, and allow the 10 days for a response.

TRAINING

The Bushcare training program is delivered on site and tailored to the needs of the groups and individuals. Volunteers are given guidance and instruction on topics that include herbicide use and safe working practices, weed removal techniques and basic principles of Bush Regeneration and ecology.

A new program was instigated for the 2000/2001 financial year to allow a higher level of training for volunteers. This program offers competency based advanced training for those volunteers who show interest. This further level of training will assist in identifying those groups that require less structured supervision.

The training program will be divided up into three levels – basic, intermediate and advanced training. All volunteers will need to complete basic training in Bushcare. This training will occur on the Bushcare site and will consist of weed removal techniques and basic principles of Bush Regeneration, basic herbicide use and safe working practices. Refresher training will be undertaken as required.

Intermediate training will consist of more detailed instruction on bush regeneration techniques, weed identification, and site management issues. The advanced training will cover issues beyond the immediate work of the group such as fauna management, sensitive vegetation management, Aboriginal site awareness, plant propagation, wildlife monitoring, and preparation of site strategies.

The Bushcare program will also offer a limited number of scholarships to receive formal bush regeneration training from Blue Mountains TAFE to volunteers with a proven level of commitment to the Bushcare program. Nominations from those interested in receiving the scholarships will be called for regularly.

SITE STRATEGY / SITE ASSESSMENT

Site strategies

Work on Bushcare sites is to be carried out in accordance with a site strategy. The strategy will outline the short and long term goals for the rehabilitation of the site, and the means by which they can be achieved.

The Bushcare Officer has responsibility for compiling site strategies in consultation with the group. It is important that the whole group agrees on what the final results of the area should be. A copy of the final site strategy will be given to each member of the group.



An important element with the site strategies is to ensure that vegetation is not cleared beyond the group's ability to maintain it. Benign neglect is better than active mismanagement.

Within the site strategy it will be important to determine what the Bushcare group wants to achieve on the site (aim), what they plan to do (objectives), how they plan to do it (methods), and how the results will be measured (evaluation and documentation).

A site strategy should contain:

- Aims and objectives for the site;
- A map of the area and its major features;
- A description of the topography and landuse within and adjacent to the site;

- Details and location of key areas of stress such as stormwater pipes, property boundaries;
- Description and map of the flora and fauna, particularly if there are any rare and endangered species or vegetation communities and how they should be managed;
- Effects of any existing plans of management or other reports affecting the site;
- Location, type and extent of weed species present and in what density (if possible using the Blue Space methodology);
- A works program detailing remediation work to be undertaken;
- What is required to complete actions;
- How the success of outcomes will be measured;
- Scheduling of timetables of activities; and
- Photographs of the site using fixed control points to monitor progress.

All activities need to be in accordance with Council's Management Plan and any plans of management or other plan applying to the reserve.

The work schedules should take into account volunteer numbers, the number of working hours available to the group, and the potential loss of volunteers over time.

Consideration should be given to maintenance of existing areas and future ongoing maintenance of new areas prior to any recommendation about new primary work.

RECORDS / MONITORING

Log books

Council will provide log books for groups to use at each work session for recording the following information:

- Date of work session;
- Names of people attending the work session;
- Hours worked by each person;
- The name of the Bushcare officer and the number of hours they worked;
- The type of work carried out;
- Areas where work was carried out;
- Any other information the group considers relevant to the project, such as observations about the site; and
- The book can be retained by the group but copies of records will be provided to Council when requested, so that the data can be used for planning purposes and reports such as the State of the Environment Report.

Council records

Council will maintain:

- A register of general information about Bushcare groups for public use; and

- A confidential register of volunteer details (personal information such as contact details will not be released without written consent from the individual volunteers concerned).

At present the community supervisors of the Bushcare groups keep records of hours worked by volunteers. A process is being developed for Bushcare staff to keep duplicate records and track progress in meeting objectives set out in the Bushcare Site Strategies. In addition, as the strategies come on line, the Bushcare staff will monitor the achievement of time lines specified in the reports.

Photo monitoring

Over the past six months, the Bushcare Unit has been developing a system to monitor progress made on Bushcare sites. A number of photo points are established on the site, and photos and other information are recorded over time. The photos have been logged onto a specially developed Bushcare Site Monitoring database that stores the images and data electronically. At this point, three sites have been monitored in this way - Pippas Pass, Wentworth Falls Lake and Centenary Reserve.

TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

Provision of tools and equipment

Council will be responsible for providing the necessary tools and equipment for volunteer groups.

Tools and equipment will be made available to Bushcare groups, and individual volunteers where necessary, on permanent or temporary loan.

All tools provided remain the property of Council. Bushcare groups are responsible for ensuring that equipment is returned to Council in the event of the group disbanding or a volunteer leaving the program.

Volunteers are not to use power tools on site other than cordless electric drills.

Exceptions may be possible for qualified trades people or Workcover accredited operators, particularly in the case of landscaping or construction projects. Copies of the relevant licenses and permits will need to be retained by Council.

Maintenance of equipment

Individual volunteers will be issued with gloves and personal safety equipment.

Volunteers will also be provided with leather tool pouches and belts, secateurs, knives, trowels, saws, loppers, first aid kits, tarpaulins for carrying weeds, and equipment for maintaining tools. This equipment will either be issued to groups on permanent loan or brought to workdays by the Bushcare Officer.

Consumables such as gloves, herbicide, saw blades, weed bags, and replacement first aid products will be reissued as required.

Other equipment such as tree injection gear and plant propagating materials will be issued or loaned to groups as necessary.

Any equipment requiring qualified operators will be organised by the Bushcare Officer as required.

Bushcare groups will be responsible for daily maintenance of tools and equipment that have been issued, such as cleaning, oiling and sharpening and recording any loss of, or damage to equipment, in the log book. Council will be responsible for repair of tools and equipment and replacing equipment that is lost or damaged beyond repair, as necessary.

RUBBISH DISPOSAL

Council will arrange removal or chipping of rubbish from Bushcare sites as necessary, provided appropriate notice is given by the group and rubbish is taken to a predetermined collection point.

Where possible, cleared weeds that do not contain seeds or other vegetative material that can reproduce, should be left on site. Small branches mulch down quickly and larger branches should be used for bank stabilization, erosion control, habitat and for purposes such as track marking or defining boundaries.

Exotic seeds and vegetative material that can reproduce (propagules such as seeds, tubers, and corms) are to be bagged and removed from the site.

All debris for removal (that cannot be left on site) will be neatly stacked (not criss-crossed) in a suitable location so that it does not present a danger to traffic or pedestrians. Access must be suitable for a large truck and a Bobcat loader. Large branches should be cut into lengths of shorter than two meters and should be able to be lifted by two people. Native timber should not be placed in piles for removal; it must be left for habitat.

Keep all non-vegetative rubbish separate from vegetation.

Volunteers should not attempt to remove any potentially dangerous rubbish, eg asbestos, syringes or chemical drums. Council staff should be notified if such items are found.

Burning of rubbish heaps

There are occasions where it is appropriate to burn on site the weed material removed during Bushcare work. This is usually when heat is required to stimulate native plant regeneration from the seed bank.

Volunteers are not authorised to burn rubbish heaps on Council reserves. Burning of heaps can be arranged after consultation with the Bushcare Officer. If on site burning is required, then arrangements will have to be complete before work commences. Information on procedures for the burning of rubbish heaps will be provided to volunteers as required.

Ecological burns, other than those in a Bush Fire Risk Management Plan, require an approval from the EPA under the *Clean Air (Control of Burning) Regulation*. Applications are to be made by the Bushcare Officers to the Regional Manager of the EPA for specific approval under Clause 8 of the Regulation.

EXTERNAL FUNDING

Opportunities for external funding of Bushcare projects are available through various sources, such as the Natural Heritage Trust.

It is important that externally funded projects are properly planned and managed and that this can be clearly demonstrated to funding bodies.

When work is being carried out on Council land, Council has a legal responsibility to ensure that the relevant Acts and policies (eg. competitive tendering, occupational health and safety, public liability insurance etc) are complied with.

Council also has a responsibility to set management priorities across its jurisdiction. This involves taking an overview of needs and considering local and regional priorities. Projects identified for inclusion in external funding applications should be consistent with such priorities. This also helps ensure that the effort required for preparing applications and managing projects is used as effectively as possible.

The Bushcare group may have responsibilities for managing and evaluating a project. Grant programs are often specifically aimed at community groups, and funding bodies may require assurance that the community group is a genuine partner.

Where practical, Council and Bushcare groups will take advantage of external funding opportunities for the expansion of the Bushcare program activities. This will often involve forming a partnership to carry out a particular project.

If a partnership is formed, an agreement will be drawn up before the funding application is lodged which states where responsibilities lie for various aspects of the project. This should reflect the issues described above.

Where work on Council reserves is involved, Bushcare groups cannot apply for external grants or manage projects independently. Such projects can be undertaken as a partnership between the group and Council. Council will act as financial trustee for these projects.

Selecting projects for external funding

Volunteers and Council officers should identify projects on Bushcare sites that are suitable for external funding during the development and review of site strategies.

Council will maintain a schedule of works required on Bushcare sites, so that suitable projects can be selected when applications for grant programs are invited.

Council and the Bushcare group should develop grant applications jointly.

Grant applications need to be signed by the Council's General Manager, and by the Bushcare group coordinator.



Council will select projects for funding submissions in consultation with Bushcare groups according to:

- Suitability of project to the funding program, according to the stated priorities for each program;
- Ability of Council and the group to fulfill associated commitments;
- Ability of the Bushcare Officer to fulfill a project management role;
- Potential ecological, educational or other benefits of the project; and
- Consistency of the project with local and regional priorities.

Sharing resources between Council and other organisations

It is an inherent aspect of the Bushcare program that it forms strong links with the community. The program also works very closely and effectively with other organisations - both locally and regionally. This includes the utilisation of skilled labour from TAFE colleges, Green Corps and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. There are numerous cross benefits and gains made from these relationships. For example TAFE classes will often work on Bushcare grant project sites, helping the group to project completion but also gaining the educational opportunity of working in a "real life" project. The program has also worked cooperatively with local schools and Westmount Co-operative Society. In addition, the work of Bushcare groups often complements work undertaken by Council's Environmental Weeds Team and contractors working for the Urban Runoff Control Program.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

All employers and employees, including volunteers, in NSW are covered by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act, 2000*. The Workcover Authority administers the Act. It aims to protect the health, safety and welfare of people at work. It lays down general requirements that must be met at places of work. Council treats Bushcare volunteers and their activities in the same manner as employees involved in any other Council activity.

It is stated in Council's occupational health and safety policy that the safety, health and well being of all Council employees are of the utmost importance and all levels of management and supervision should regard these issues as their highest priorities.

To ensure the safety of those involved with the Bushcare program, Council at a minimum will:

- Maintain the equipment that is in their care, in a condition that is safe to use;
- Make arrangements to ensure the safe use, handling, storage and transportation of equipment and substances; and
- Provide information, training and supervision where necessary to ensure the health and safety of volunteers.

Volunteers must take reasonable care of the health and safety of others and co-operate with the Bushcare Officers in their efforts to maintain safety.

Information provided to volunteers

Information will be provided about:

- The *Occupational Health and Safety Act, 2000*;
- Possible workplace hazards;
- UV Protection;
- Manual handling;
- First aid for snake and spider bites; and
- Herbicide safety.

Personal protective clothing and equipment

Council recognises the need to protect all volunteers at their place of work and endeavours to eliminate dangers from the work environment. Where there is still a danger, personal protective clothing and equipment will be issued. Registered volunteers can be provided with:

- Sun / safety glasses;
- Sunscreen;
- Gloves (waterproof cotton / latex and leather);
- Safety vest (when necessary, see Road Safety section); and
- First aid.

The Bushcare Officer will arrange for these items to be issued and replaced as necessary. It is the responsibility of the Bushcare officer to ensure that volunteers are wearing personal protective equipment when required.

Bushcare volunteers should wear a hat and long sleeved shirts and long trousers.

Sturdy footwear should be worn at all times. Safety boots may be necessary in some circumstances. The Bushcare Officer will identify situations where safety boots are required. An example would be work with rocks or other heavy materials.

Protection from ultra violet light

Council has a UV protection policy, the *Ultraviolet Radiation Protection Policy for Persons Working Outdoors*. As volunteers rarely work outdoors for more than 10 hours a month they fit within the category of occasional volunteers. It is therefore not considered appropriate for Council to issue uniforms to volunteers and require them to be worn. However safety glasses and sunscreen will be issued along with information about UV protection.

Volunteers are strongly advised to comply with the UV policy that states that outdoor workers should wear a hat and use lipscreen and sunscreen on all exposed skin. Sunscreen and lipscreen should be reapplied at least every two hours. As stated above, Bushcare volunteers should wear long sleeved shirts and long trousers.

If a volunteer is required to regularly work long hours outdoors, the issue of protective clothing may be considered.

Accident procedure

If an accident occurs, appropriate first aid should be rendered and medical help sought if necessary.

All accidents should be recorded in the log book and notified to the Bushcare Officer. In some circumstances, accidents will have to be reported to the WorkCover Authority on a WorkCover Accident Report Form.

Reporting is required if, as a result of an accident on the worksite, someone dies or is injured so that he or she cannot carry out their duties for at least seven continuous days. It is also necessary in the event of any occurrence involving imminent risk of death or serious injury to any person (eg. an electric shock) or substantial damage to property.

Bushcare Officers will carry Workcover accident forms, and will be responsible for ensuring that forms are filled out and forwarded to Councils Risk Management Branch. They are also responsible for reporting other more minor accidents to the Risk Management Branch when necessary.

First aid

First aid officers

According to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act, 2000*, when a group of less than 25 people are working outdoors, there is no legal requirement that a person with a first aid certificate be in attendance. However, in accordance with the provision for volunteer supervision, there will usually be a Bushcare Officer with first aid qualification, in attendance at workdays.

It is important that volunteers have at least basic knowledge of how to deal with particular hazards that may be encountered, such as snake and spider bites. Such information will be provided during training.

First aid kits

A first aid kit should be kept on site during Bushcare work sessions. The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* specifies the type of kit required in different situations. The “C” kit is the most basic one and is for sites where there are less than 10 people. The “B” kit is the next step up and is for workplaces with 10 to 100 people. These kits and replacement materials will be supplied by Council. “C” kits are issued to groups. “B” kits are carried by Bushcare Officers.

Road safety

Volunteers should avoid working on or near roads wherever possible.

Where volunteers need to work on a road reserve or any other place where vehicle traffic is present and may represent a hazard, they must wear a safety vest at all times. During wet weather a yellow rain jacket is an acceptable alternative.

In some circumstances where work needs to be undertaken near roads it may be necessary to use traffic warning signs or employ traffic control measures. This will be the responsibility of the Bushcare Officer and be carried out in accordance with Australian Standard 1742.3-1996. Road Safety

Herbicides

The use of herbicide must be in accordance with Council guidelines and the manufacturers instructions. Herbicides should only be used by volunteers who have undergone the introductory Bushcare training. Training will include provision of a Materials Safety Data Sheet, information about herbicide types, how they work, application methods, and Occupational Health and Safety. Only Glyphosate herbicide supplied by Council is to be used. Spraying by volunteers is not permitted and is only carried out by Council officers, unless a volunteer is fully chemical certified. Protective gloves are to be used at all times when handling herbicides. Trained volunteers can choose not to use herbicides.

A dye will be added to herbicide used by volunteers to assist in rapid detection and treatment of any spills.

The use of other herbicides by Bushcare volunteers may be considered if the need arises. Appropriate training, usage and testing procedures would have to be implemented.

Applicators and storage

Glyphosate can be applied using “perm bottles”, and other similar containers, but not other containers used for food or drink.

These must be labeled with “poison” and the name of the product.

Used applicators must be stored in a sealed container, eg. plastic bucket with lid and labeled “poison”. These will be supplied by Council.

Herbicide should not be stored in these applicators. However, if these are being used on a continuous basis, it may be more hazardous to decant and refill them frequently, than to leave herbicide in them. Herbicide can therefore be kept in the applicators for a few days if necessary. They must be stored as above.

INSURANCE

Bushcare volunteers carry out a wide range of activities on land that is under the care and control of Council. Provided that Council approves the work undertaken, the volunteer is covered by Council’s insurance.

The following statements are a brief summary only and represent the policy as current at the end of June 2002. **Council’s Risk Manager should be contacted for full details of Policy conditions.**

Council holds personal accident and public liability policies that cover the activities of volunteers up to 90 years of age, working on approved Bushcare Projects.

Personal accident policy

The personal accident policy for volunteer workers covers the following:

1. Death and total disabilities benefits limited to \$300,000;
2. Weekly Benefits: 100% of average weekly income up to a maximum of \$1,250 per week; Aggregate Period 156 Weeks; Temporary Partial Disablement benefits shall be limited to 75% of average weekly income up to a maximum of \$938 per week, indexed annually by CPI from the date of claim; and
3. A schedule of benefits provides lump sum payments for permanent injuries and disability to parts of the body forms part of the policy cover.

Public liability and liability insurance

For Council to be held liable for injury to others or damage to their property, negligence on the part of Council must be proven. Council is liable in relation to the negligent acts or omissions by formally appointed volunteers involved in approved

projects, except in cases of criminal negligence, e.g. whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Definitive answers to questions of liability cannot be given because of the complex legal principles which need to be considered in each case, however, it can be assumed that we all owe some duty of care to each and every person in the community. Where children are concerned, this has been shown to be virtually total responsibility.

Stated simply, this duty of care is:

“Each of us has a duty to ensure that the inappropriate action or inaction which we may take does not have the potential to cause reasonably foreseeable harm to others”.

Please note

It is important that Council’s Risk Manager be immediately advised of any incident which occurs that may give rise to a claim against the Council. Failure to notify may adversely affect Council’s insurance cover.

THE PRIVACY ACT

As a local government agency Council must comply with the provisions of the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* when collecting personal information. Amongst other things this Act means Council must take care that the information collected is up-to-date and kept securely.

More specifically, the BMCC Privacy Management Plan requires Council when collecting ‘personal information’ from the public to advise them of the following:

- The fact that the information is being collected;
- The purpose for which the information is collected;
- The intended recipients of the information;
- Whether supply of the information is required by law or is voluntary and the possible consequences of failure to supply the information;
- The existence of any right to access and correct the information; and
- The name, address and contact details of that part of Council collecting the information.

The following personal information is collected and maintained by Bushcare Officers:

Collection of names and addresses for the Bushcare mail-list

This information is provided by Bushcare Volunteers to Council Bushcare Officers. The Bushcare mail-list is managed and updated by the Bushcare Officers. This database contains names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and training information on bushcare volunteers. This information is primarily used for mailing out Bushcare group newsletters as well as the quarterly Bushcare newsletter, ‘The Gecko’. Volunteers may request at any time to have their information deleted from the mail-list. The list is also made available to other sections of Council when information relevant to Bushcare Volunteers needs to be distributed eg. advice of

public exhibitions, notification of programs / projects that may effect the bushcare site, etc.

Collection of names and addresses on Bushcare workdays

This information is collected at each workday by the Bushcare Officer. The information is collected to record attendance at workdays and hours worked and for purposes of risk management (see 'Insurance' section above). The numbers of hours worked are totalled for the group and used for reporting purposes for each site.

Photographs of Bushcare Volunteers

Bushcare Officers often take photos of Bushcare Volunteers. As well as forming a historical record of Bushcare Volunteers and the Bushcare site, these photos are occasionally used in promotional material including the Gecko newsletter and on Council's website.

PUBLICITY / EDUCATION

Use of the media

Council staff will offer assistance where possible when Bushcare groups wish to use the media to publicise their activities.

Any material that includes statements attributed to Council staff or interpretations of Council policy must be approved by Council's General Manager before being offered for publication.

Paid advertisements

Council will use the local newspapers to publicise Bushcare activities as funds permit. Information about the Bushcare program and the group's workdays will be published regularly.

In addition, Council will pay for specific advertisements for groups on an occasional basis. Groups can decide on the timing and nature of the advertising in consultation with the Bushcare Officer.

Council will pay for additional publicity, eg. for special events, if appropriate. Groups should inform the Bushcare Officer if an advertisement is required. Advanced notice of at least three weeks is necessary.

Newsletters, circulars and letterbox drops

Council will provide assistance with photocopying and postage for groups wanting to keep members informed via newsletters and workday reminders.

Council will also assist with production and photocopying of brochures - eg for letterbox drops to inform the local community about the group, or to publicise special events.

Letterbox drops in locations where a Bushcare group will be starting or an existing group is looking to expand, are useful to recruit interested community members.

The level of assistance available for newsletters and brochures will depend on available resources.

Public meetings / field days and community events

Public meetings and field days can be an effective way of promoting the activities of a Bushcare group. If required, Council and Bushcare groups will arrange occasional public meetings. Council will cover the cost of publicity (brochures, advertisements in the local press), venue hire and light refreshments.

The Bushcare Unit regularly attends and displays promotional material at environmentally focused community events. Attendance at these events gives the opportunity to promote the program as a whole, recruit more volunteers and raise awareness about environmental weeds in people's gardens. Both Bushcare staff and volunteers attend the Bushcare stalls.

Displays

Displays at special events, in local libraries etc. are another useful promotional tool. Council will assist where possible with the loan of display boards, and with production of displays including photography, enlargements, laminating, etc.

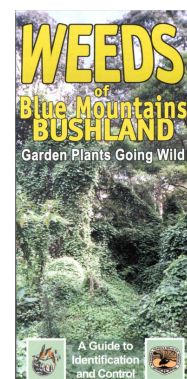
Educational and promotional material

Bushcare volunteers produced the first set of educational material, the '*Weed of the Month*' series with assistance from Council. A classic environmental weed or 'Garden Thug' is assigned to each month of the year. The brochures are aimed at the home gardener who may be inadvertently growing these plants in their garden, and encourages their removal. Approximately 30,000 brochures were distributed since the project began in 1997. Initially the project was mainly focused on weeds in the upper mountains. In 1999 the strategy was expanded and more brochures were developed to create a unique set tailored to the weeds of the lower mountains.

In 1999 the Blue Mountains Weeds Booklet project was launched in association with the National Parks and Wildlife Service to produce a full colour booklet that describes 30 of the mountains worst weeds, and extra information on bushland management and care of our reserves.

Approximately 20,000 '*Weeds of Blue Mountains Bushland*' booklets have been distributed through volunteers, Council officers and displays. Distribution of the weeds booklet occurs in the following ways:

- Handouts at community open days; and
- Letterbox drops.



Through permanent public displays at:

- Council's Katoomba and Springwood Offices;
- Katoomba Library;
- Springwood Library; and
- Blaxland Library.

Newsletter

The Bushcare unit began the publishing of a regular newsletter - the "Gecko" - in 1998. It is published quarterly and is distributed to all Bushcare volunteers, other Councils and Councillors. It serves to highlight the value of the program and individual groups, to distribute information and offers an opportunity for individuals to contribute.

Bushcare e-mail groups are being established to share information and offer reminders regarding group meeting times.

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

The Christmas Party

An annual Christmas party is held each year as a gesture of thanks from Council to the volunteers. Special certificates of merit are presented to long term Bushcare groups.



Certificates

Upon completion of training, volunteers will be given a certificate of attainment. Groups that have achieved a certain number of hours will also receive certificates of recognition / appreciation.

Special events

Council Bushcare staff organise a series of special event evenings where a special guest speaker gives a talk on a topic of some interest to Bushcare volunteers. These evenings have been very well attended and act as a good source of new recruitment of future volunteers. Recent topics include the ecology of bats, feral animal control, threatened species management and landuse by Aboriginals.

BLUE MOUNTAINS BUSHCARE NETWORK

The Bushcare program aims to help support the existing Blue Mountains Bushcare Network within the mountains. This forum promotes the “bigger picture” of all Bushcare groups and individuals working together against weeds and bushland degradation. The Network has a membership beyond Council supported groups to all groups and individuals who work to restore bushland in the Blue Mountains.

The Bushcare Network has a particular role to play in bushland management in the Blue Mountains. It helps facilitate the necessary interaction between Council and Bushcare volunteers, and requires acknowledgment and assistance for this.

Purpose of the network

The Bushcare Network:

- Represents the Bushcare groups and can speak on their behalf on certain issues, such as the review of policies, plans and other documents. The Network therefore facilitates communication between the groups as a whole, and Council and other authorities;
- Is independent of Council but recognised as playing an important role in ensuring the smooth running of the Bushcare program, and promoting good bushland management practices in the Blue Mountains;
- Holds regular meetings open to all interested people at which issues of importance to Bushcare groups are discussed;
- Elects office bearers annually; and
- Council will consult with the Network on relevant policy and procedural issues regarding bushland management.

Assistance from Council

Council will:

- Pay for the hire of an appropriate venue for the Network meetings;
- Maintain the Networks mailing list (the Network will be responsible for advising Council when alterations to the mailing list are required);
- Copy and distribute minutes of the Network minutes (the Network will be responsible for recording minutes at meetings); and
- Provide other assistance if appropriate.

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