

HAMILTON FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

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Planning Department
Shire of Southern Grampians

2 Feb 2018

Re: Planning Permit Application by Hamilton Field Naturalists Club for removal of *Acacia paradoxa* and *Acacia longifolia* from the Wannon Flora Reserve.

The Hamilton Field Naturalists Club (HFNC) has an objective to restore the indigenous botanic diversity of the Wannon Flora Reserve by controlling the spread of *Acacia paradoxa* and *A. longifolia* in that reserve. Both species are native flora and we are aware of the need to have permission to remove them. As the Shire of Southern Grampians is the designated manager of this reserve, this Planning Permit application (with a request for a fee waiver) is being made to the Shire, rather than DELWP or to Parks Victoria, the former managers of the reserve.

Historically, part of the reserve had been stripped of gravel and sand before it was acquired by the Dundas Shire in 1959 and given to the then Wannon Falls Committee of Management to manage. That committee entrusted the Hamilton Field Naturalists Club to manage what was then called the '18-Acre Reserve'. HFNC has had a vital interest in this reserve since 1959 and has carried out botanic surveys since that time, as well as providing the original rabbit-proof fencing, removal of truck loads of rubbish and control of weeds. Much effort was made from 1963-1980 to control emerging Hedge Wattle (*Acacia paradoxa*) seedlings – a species that was then a declared agricultural pest because of its thorns. At annual Working Bees, HFNC members pulled out tens of thousands of seedlings over those years. Regrettably, that work ceased after 1980.

The botanic diversity of the Wannon Flora Reserve has been endangered over the last 30 years by the dense growth of *Acacia paradoxa* in the area. This has created much difficulty in controlling rabbits and has resulted in suppression of the native flora. Species that were present, and now appear to have vanished, include Gorse Bitter-pea (*Davesia ulicifolia*), Blue-spike Milkwort (*Comesperma calymega*), Showy Podolepis (*Podolepis jaceoides*), Shrub Violet (*Hybanthus floribundus*), Greencomb Spider Orchid (*Caladenia tentaculata*) and Plain-lip Spider Orchid (*Caladenia clavigera*). These species are not recorded elsewhere on the Wannon or in the district.

The 18-Acre Reserve was designated a Flora Reserve in the late 1980s, following the Land Conservation Council's report of 1982. This significant flora reserve has a historical list of 172 species of indigenous vascular flora, complemented by a further 42 species in the adjacent Wannon Falls Scenic Reserve, bringing the total to 214 species. The Wannon Flora Reserve and the other small reserves on the Wannon River frontages, including Nigretta Flora Reserve and Wannon Rapids Flora Reserve, are the repositories of what remains of the original vegetation of the area before clearing occurred. The LCC Report for SW Area, District 2 (1982) notes that '...the reserve contains representatives of the native plants of the Dundas Tablelands, where public land is now of very limited extent. The management authority should protect the native flora...'

The EVC for this reserve is *Damp Sands Herb-rich Woodland*, which should only have a Medium shrub cover of 15%, and the list of medium shrubs in the benchmark does not include *A. paradoxa*. There is also a developing problem of intrusion of Sallow Wattle (*Acacia longifolia*) into the heathland. This species is not regarded as indigenous to this area and has seeded there from plantings made many years ago in the Wannon Falls Scenic Reserve. Parks Victoria (Casterton Office) conducted work in 2008 to remove the species from the road verge and inside the reserve on the southern side.

We believe that the best approach would be to cut out the large *A. paradoxa* shrubs and pull out any seedlings, rather than using fire across the reserve, which would generate an enormous number of seedlings from this species. In 1998, NRE or PV lit a fire in the eastern half of the reserve that

resulted in the loss of old hollow Manna Gums without achieving its ecological purpose because it did not run well. Although the reserve had roads on 3 sides, a bulldozer had been used to make destructive breaks in this small reserve. Those breaks did not faithfully follow the boundaries on the east or west sides. It included one strip across the heathland some 25 m from the eastern boundary that caused more damage, removing a significant amount of the native vegetation (including the only patch of *Allocasuarina pusilla*) and opening up the reserve for the introduction of alien species. We fear that similar approaches to the use of fire to restore this reserve would be equally destructive.

Our plan would be to cut out the larger invasive *A. paradoxa* first, working west from the less infested eastern side (Wannon-Nigretta Rd). Removal of the larger shrubs would be done in stages, since the population is so great. That would also make it easier to deal with the debris. Our approach would be to pile the removed shrubs into small heaps on the cleared track that runs along the northern side of the reserve and burn them in winter time, to avoid any danger of fire affecting any private land. The small fires would also be controlled to prevent them affecting the reserve.

The task of cutting out the tall *A. paradoxa* shrubs will be onerous and we envisage that HFNC, now with an aging membership, will need to gain a grant that will support paid labour to do much of that heavy work.

Emerging seedlings would be pulled out by hand in following years, to prevent re-infestation from what will be a substantial soil seed bank. Members of HFNC would volunteer to perform that task.

A map of the Wannon Flora Reserve is shown below.

Yours faithfully

Rod Bird

Secretary
Hamilton Field Naturalists Club



Follow up correspondence re. TP/3/2018:

Planning Permit Application by HFNC for removal of *Acacia paradoxa* and *Acacia longifolia* from the Wannon Flora Reserve

Kerri-Anne Tatchell
Senior Planner
Planning Department
Southern Grampians Shire Council

24 Feb 2018

Dear Kerri-Anne

Thank you for letter of 8 Feb 2018 regarding our application for a planning permit (TP/3/2018) for the removal of native vegetation at the Wannon Flora Reserve.

With regard to the 3 points raised in your letter, our response is as follows:

- Request for Current certificate of Title for 2006/PP5830 in the Township of Wannon and the Parish of Bochara:

After some searching and enquiry of DELWP we are advised that “*Certificates of Title do not exist for Crown allotments. Crown land is described by its Crown Descriptor consisting of Allotment, Section, Township and Parish Name*”. This advice came from the Land and Built Environment team in DELWP and if you require further explanation all I can do is to forward the email with attachments that was sent to us.

- Written permission from the land manager:

We would be happy if you would forward our application to the land manager (Shire of Southern Grampians), Mr Michael McCarthy, Director of Shire Futures. We understand that the Shire has a Works Plan for the Wannon Falls Scenic Reserve & Nigretta Falls Scenic Reserve but that does not include or cover the Wannon Flora Reserve. We are confident that our objective is consistent with the objectives of that Works Plan.

- Plan indicating the extent of vegetation removal:

Please view the **attachment** below that seeks to provide the information sought.

Regards

Rod Bird

Secretary
Hamilton Field Naturalists Club

Attachment: HFNC Plan for the Removal of Invasive Shrubs from the Wannan Flora Reserve

As outlined in our application to remove *A. longifolia* and *A. paradoxa*, our approach for these species is as follows:

Acacia longifolia – compared with *A. paradoxa* there are relatively few (<500) of this invasive species that require removal. The species is not indigenous to this landscape. They are mainly located on the southern fringe of the reserve. The approach would be to cull all that occur throughout the reserve other than in the southern fringes adjacent to the Glenelg Highway. This would be done by lopping large shrubs and hand-pulling small seedlings. That will remove the source of infestation from the main area of reserve. Follow-up work would be envisaged in the following year to pull any seedlings that have emerged.

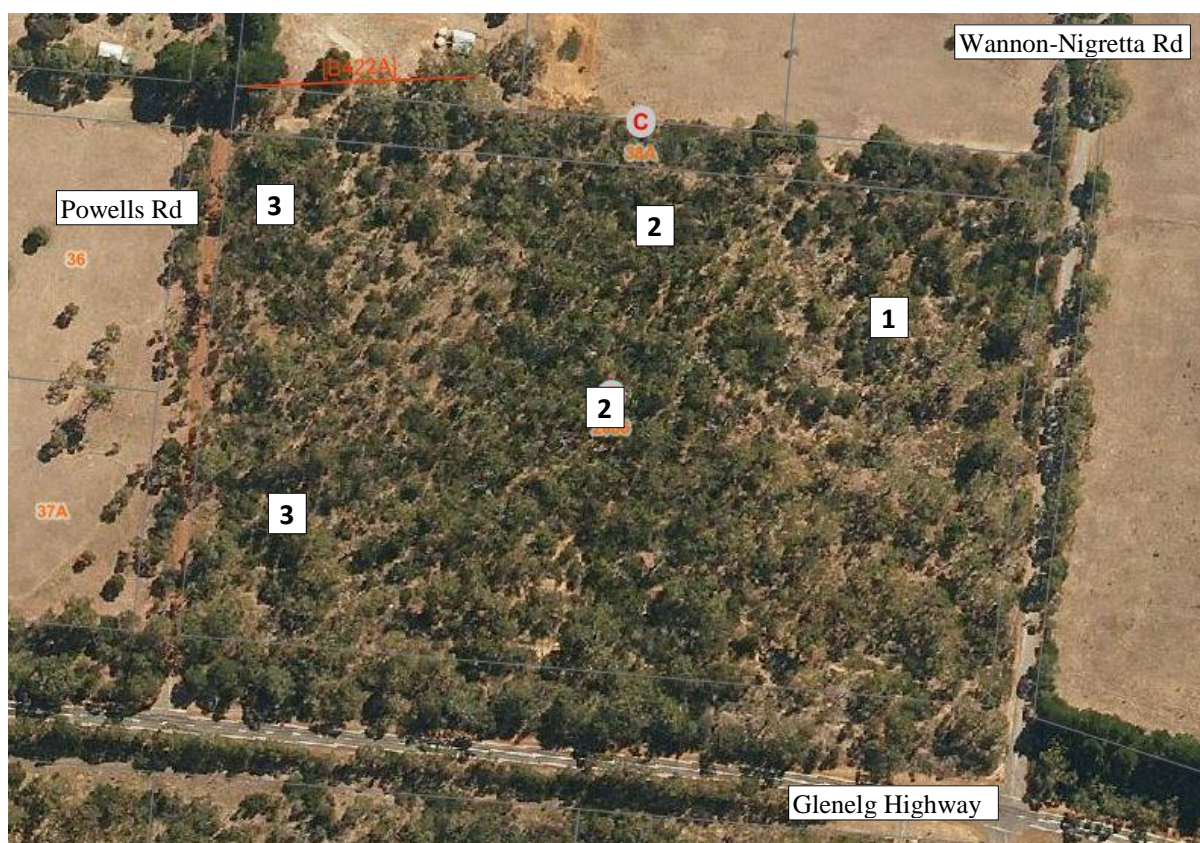
The infestation of *A. longifolia* adjacent to the highway would be tackled once the first objective has been accomplished.

Acacia paradoxa – the approach here will be to work from the less-infested north-eastern end of the reserve near Wannan-Nigretta Rd. That will be the first step (area indicated by [1] in the photo). This first step will contribute positively to a required reduction in canopy cover for this EVC. The cut and pulled shrubs in this area can mostly be left *insitu* to degrade since they constitute little biomass and are spread widely across the site.

The second stage of the work will require the removal of thickets of tall shrubs, mainly in the northern mid-section of the reserve (indicated by [2] on the photo). This will substantially contribute to the reduction in required canopy closure for the EVC.

The third stage [3] would move to the western fringe adjacent to Powells Rd where thickets also occur. This will substantially contribute to the reduction in required canopy closure for the EVC.

The cut shrubs will mostly be removed from the reserve. The best approach would be to burn small piles in winter time on the track along the northern end of the reserve or at up to 4 contained spots within the reserve. Extensive fires are not desirable since that would remove other vegetation and promote acacia regeneration. Emerging seedlings would be pulled by hand in the years following the cutting out of tall acacia shrubs.



HFNC Proposal TP/3/2018 for Removal of Invasive Acacia Shrubs from the Wannan Flora Reserve – a revised application with further information

Rod Bird, 19 March 2018

More information and a revised application is given for removal of Acacia at Wannan Flora Reserve.

Background

The Hamilton Field Naturalists Club has a long association with the Wannan Flora Reserve – long before HFNC made a submission to the LCC in the 1980s for such protection. Our interest began in 1959 when the club wrote to the then Committee of Management of the Wannan and Nigretta Reserves offering support to develop the '18 Acre Reserve', which had been used as a rubbish tip and a source of sand and gravel. The committee was happy to be relieved of the work and expense.

From 1963 to 1969 HFNC had 11 working bees to remove tons of rubbish, to rabbit-proof fence the reserve and to remove thousands of *Acacia paradoxa* seedlings that had established on the disturbed areas [see '*HFNC Environmental Advocacy and Action 1958-2008*' by Diane Luhrs (2009)].

HFNC collected and, with the assistance of Portland botanist AC Beaglehole, identified the flora of the reserve (Margaret Corrick, later a botanist at the Victorian Herbarium was one of those members). The list of indigenous native flora for the reserve was 171 species [see '*Indigenous Vascular Flora of the Wannan River Frontages from Wannan Falls to the Red Rd Bridge*' (Rod Bird 2011)].

Removal of the spiny *A. paradoxa* (which was then classified as a 'noxious weed') continued annually until about 1980 and sporadically thereafter. Sallow Wattle (*A. longifolia*) emerged as a threat after 1980. There has been some work from 2003 to control *Sparaxis bulbifera* and Freesia.

The *A. paradoxa* has spread from the west to invade the wetter heathland in the NE quarter of the reserve. Currently the western half is packed with thickets of the wattle. The consequence has been the disappearance of dozens of the ground flora species. Put simply, virtually nothing grows under the thickets of *A. paradoxa* and it is clear that what was a magnificent flora reserve is being trashed. Rabbits burrow under the thickets, resulting in additional damage when the manager is asked by landowners to control the rabbits and the easy option is to send in a back-hoe, regardless of any negative impact on native vegetation.

The management of this reserve reverted to DCF&L in the late 1980s, to PV in the 1990s and then to the Shire in about 2004. We had expected that the managers of the reserve would look after it but nothing was done to control the pest species. On the contrary, activities arising from machinery doing rabbit control works, the bulldozing of a perimeter track and the impact of a prescribed fire in 1999 that burned down old Manna Gums, has been anything but helpful.

HFNC has contributed a lot to this reserve and we are most disappointed in seeing its dissolution. We have offered to try and do the job that DELWP or PV could be expected to do. We have the experience/expertise for the task and have been dismayed at the difficulties that have arisen.

Amended application

In response to a letter from Mr Scott Elliott of DELWP to the SGSC, concerning this application, we have modified our proposal to constitute 2 stages:

1. Remove *A. paradoxa* from 0.5 ha in the NE corner of the Flora Reserve (50 m to the west and 100 m south). This part of the heathland area is badly infested with large shrubs.
2. Apply for a Planning Permit Exemption for further works on the remainder of the reserve, to follow in a later year or years. The work involved there is extremely large and would involve at least 2 stages (middle section and section along the western edge).

HFNC members already volunteer to control weeds on public reserves (e.g. Fulham Streamside Reserve and Nigretta Flora Reserve) but may be able to undertake part of the work in Stage 1, the work will not go far if we are not successful in gaining funds to engage help to do the heavy and unpleasant work of removing the large, spiny shrubs.



Stage 1. *Acacia paradoxa* – the approach here will be to work from the less-infested north-eastern end of the reserve near Wannon-Nigretta Rd (area indicated by [1] in the photo). This first step will contribute positively to a required reduction in canopy cover for this EVC. The cut and pulled small shrubs in this area can be left *in situ* to degrade since they constitute little biomass and are spread widely across the site. The large shrubs will be cut down and piled in a few selected spots that do not contain any other shrubs and will be burned during the winter. We believe that the shrubs will die if cut off below any live twigs.

Stage 2. *Acacia paradoxa* and *A. longifolia*

The second stage of the work will require the removal of thickets of tall shrubs of *A. paradoxa* (indicated by [2] on the photo). These are mainly in the northern mid-section and the western fringe adjacent to Powells Rd. *A. longifolia* occurs sporadically but thinly through much of the area. The work will substantially contribute to the reduction in required canopy closure for the EVC.

The cut shrubs from Stage 1 & Stage 2 will be burned on the reserve. One approach would be to burn small piles in winter time on the track along the northern end of the reserve. Another approach is to select up to 10 contained spots within the reserve that are devoid of shrubs and burn small heaps there. There would, of course, be some limited damage to the vegetation at these spots but far less than would occur if the acacia is allowed to continue to spread and dominate the site. Extensive fires are not desirable since that would remove other vegetation and promote acacia regeneration.

Emerging seedlings would be pulled by hand or cut off at the base in the years following the cutting out of tall acacia shrubs.

Exemptions for Conservation Work

If it is necessary to submit estimates of likely impacts of the proposed treatments in Stage 1 or Stage 2 then that will be done.

Monitoring of the work areas

This would be done annually for at least 3 years to ascertain the level of any positive or negative impacts. The main areas of interest will be the bare areas that are present where the thickets occur. Species counts can be made and photographs taken periodically at fixed points.