

Wannon Flora work report 2019: *A. paradoxa* & *A. longifolia* control project

Background to the project

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. 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 emanating from plantings in the adjacent Wannon Falls Scenic Reserve in the 1960s.

A. paradoxa has spread from the west to invade the Damp Sands Herb-rich Woodland EVC in the eastern half 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. 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 results in additional damage when the manager is asked by landowners to control the rabbits and a back-hoe is used, regardless of the negative impacts on native vegetation. Our aim is to remove those *A. paradoxa* shrubs to allow regeneration of the ground flora and to stop its further encroachment on the eastern area of heath.

In Feb. 2018 HFNC applied to the SGSC (the official manager of the reserve) for a Planning Permit for the removal of *Acacia paradoxa* and *Acacia longifolia* from the Wannon Flora Reserve. Months of negotiations and discussion with the Shire and DELWP followed the submission of that proposal (TP/3/2018): '*Removal of Invasive Acacia Shrubs from the Wannon Flora Reserve*'.

Vegetation Quality Field Assessments had to be done (Dale Tonkinson, then the Biodiversity Officer within SGSC, was most helpful) and a case put forward as to the need to remove these invasive native species. Months of delays were incurred in getting approvals to remove *A. paradoxa* and *A. longifolia*. Oddly, an exemption from the FFA Act was needed for *A. longifolia* but not for *A. paradoxa*.

Meanwhile, in March 2018 HFNC applied for a DELWP SmartyGrants Community and Volunteer Action Grant – for \$30,000 over 3 years to control the pest plants ('*Restoration of native understory flora on the Wannon Flora Reserve*'). Advice was received in June 2018 that the application was not successful ('*However, your grant application was noted to be of high quality and recommended...for support should further funding become available...*')

Many hours of work were then required to prepare another application for funding in 2019, through the Glenelg-Hopkins CMA Victorian Landcare Grants 2019-20 program. Andy Govanstone, working then with the CFA and SGSC, helped to prepare Application VLG192065 for \$19,900.

Project Title: '*Conservation of native flora on Wannon Flora Reserve through community action to control woody weeds*'

HFNC was notified in July 2019 that the application through the Landcare Grant to remove the *A. paradoxa* was not successful ('*The project did not show as high value for money ranked against other applications*').

Meanwhile, HFNC had decided to proceed with preliminary work on the Wannon Flora Reserve to investigate whether it was necessary to poison cut stumps of *A. paradoxa* and *A. longifolia* after lopping them below any branch. We would prefer not to use herbicide in the reserve and the work would be much easier without it. Since *A. longifolia* was a minor contributor to the problem in the reserve, and our permit to remove it expired in Feb 2020 (a year after it was finally granted), we decided to remove that species in 2019.

Working Bee -25 May 2019 – control of *Acacia paradoxa* and *A. longifolia*

This was attended by RB, PH, RZ, DL and A. Wilson from Wannon Falls.

We worked from 10 am to 12 noon [10 hrs]. There was some intermittent light drizzle from 10.30am.

We prepared 4 plots each approx. 10 m x 10m and applied 2 treatments to the *A. paradoxa*:

- Cutting of the shrubs below any branch or live twigs – 2 plots
- As above plus application of 50% concentration of glyphosate to the cut stump within 30 seconds of the cutting – 2 plots

There were 2 plots with a dense stand of shrubs and 2 with dispersed shrubs, towards the edge of the wet heath area in the NE part of the reserve. The cut material was left in situ, after cutting up into a few smaller sections.

For *A. longifolia*, the aim was to cut any shrubs found below any branch or live twig. The SE part of the reserve was treated, including a portion of the road reserve in the SE corner. Western Vic Roads are expected to remove the wattle from the road reserve within the next few months.

Follow up work

2 July – RB [3 hrs] cut *A. longifolia* and many small *A. paradoxa* on S side of reserve. Also cut 65 stakes from *A. paradoxa* for use at Kanawalla. Crested Shrike-tits heard in the area.

6 July – RB [3 hrs] cut down many small *A. paradoxa* shrubs to provide 63 stakes for use at Kanawalla. A Koala was seen in the SE part of the reserve, climbing down from an old Manna Gum. Many rabbit burrows and signs of activity were noted.

21 July – PH & RB [5 hrs] cut out the remainder of the *A. longifolia* in the SW part of the reserve. The reserve appears now to be clear of this species but more remains on the highway reserve. Our permit for the removal of *A. longifolia* expires in Feb. 2020. It is unclear whether we need a permit to control future germinants of this species.

More than 100 small *A. paradoxa* were lopped off at ground level while searching for *A. longifolia*. That approach is by far the easiest way to eliminate shrubs that exceed about 0.5 m in height – and it eliminates soil disturbance associated with the uprooting of seedlings. The evidence so far is that there has been no sprouting from the base of the cut stumps, but that needs to be confirmed by inspection in early 2020.

The opportunity was taken to cut 40 stakes for use at Kanawalla.

The CFA (through Andy Govanstone with SGSC) have blitzed the *A. paradoxa* on Powells Lane road reserve (both sides) and along the track on the N side of the reserve. The material has been removed from the sites. The verges along the N boundary track have been greatly disturbed by the heavy machinery, leaving scalped areas and little mounds of earth. This may lead to an influx of weeds.

Crested Shrike-tits were seen as they searched under the bark on Manna Gums in the reserve.

Control of rabbits is needed – but not the ripping of burrows which is too disruptive of the native vegetation. The SGSC is responsible for the management of this reserve and the DELWP permit has specified that HFNC is not to disturb soil or the non-target vegetation during any works.

Alternative control of rabbits includes fumigation of burrows or the introduction of the new strain of calici virus that is available from NSW. Clearly, though, removal of rabbits will be difficult until the cover of *A. paradoxa* is greatly reduced.

03 September – RB [2 hrs] cut another 28 stakes from *A. paradoxa* in the NE corner, for use at Kanawalla, and did some levelling of mounds of soil along the N boundary track where the excavator disturbed the ground.

November – Vic Rds has cleared *A. longifolia* from the road reserve from about S Reeds Rd through to the Wannon. Whether they cut down all of those wattles from the area adjacent to the SW corner (where the fence has fallen away and the position of the boundary is uncertain), remains to be seen.

Also, there are still *A. longifolia* along the Wannon-Nigretta Rd adjacent to the reserve and presumably they will need to be removed by the Shire.

Future work

We can re-apply in 2020 for a grant to continue work on the Wannon Flora Reserve, after greatly reducing the amount requested. That would allow us to tackle the fringes of the pest, keeping it out of the heath area and removing small seedlings from the other open spaces.

Whether or not we receive funding, we need to discuss what we can do to keep the east end clear of the pest species – working from the least affected fringes back into the dense thicket in the NE corner.

