

Getting involved in the management of local wetlands

This bulletin provides an overview of the work that landholders, local government and community groups have performed to improve the health of wetlands on the Southern Fitzroy Floodplain.

Working together for wetlands

Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments Inc (FRCC) and the Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) have worked in conjunction with landholders, local government, the community and other partner organisations to improve the environmental values of key wetland sites on the Southern Fitzroy Floodplain.

Wetland restoration work, including fencing, tree planting, controlled grazing, management of wildfire risk, constructing fishways and weed control, has been performed at seven sites on the Floodplain. Funding provided by the Australian Government's Great Barrier Reef Coastal Wetland Protection Program (GBRCWPP) enabled the work to occur.

Wetlands are important!

The Southern Fitzroy Floodplain is recognised as being nationally important and includes a diverse mix of freshwater wetland habitats such as seasonal swamps, stream channels and lagoons with these being bordered by tidal and marine habitats of samphire flats, saltpans and mangrove estuaries.

Wetlands have always been important to the Australian community including Indigenous people to whom wetlands have significance as key sites for hunting and gathering, camping, cultural events and as sacred places involved in the history of the landscape's creation.

Within the broader Australian community nationally recognised 'iconic' wetland areas, such as Kakadu in the Northern Territory, are readily acknowledged to be important but our relationship with wetlands also extends to local regions and backyards where as kids we may have been fortunate enough to have a local creek or 'swamp' to muck around in.

Where communities have access to wetlands they are usually valued as places for nature based recreation and are used for swimming, fishing, boating, bush walking and bird watching.

Wetlands provide significant environmental values by supporting native fisheries, providing flood mitigation and coastal protection and acting as the filters or 'kidneys' of our river basins by capturing sediments and nutrients carried in run off from agricultural lands and townships.



High value wetland habitats such as Gracemere Lagoon should be protected and improved. (Photo courtesy FRCC)

Southern Fitzroy Floodplain – wetlands worth protecting!

Much of the original floodplain has been converted to improved 'ponded pastures' for grazing by beef cattle however there are still wetland areas that include sites of significance to traditional owners, important freshwater fisheries, waterbird habitat and migratory stop-overs and are home to threatened species and at-risk ecosystems. Some of the better examples of remnant wetland habitat occur in publicly accessible Council Reserves thereby providing an opportunity for the community to become involved in protecting and improving wetland habitat values.

Local volunteers engaged in projects supported by the GBRCWPP have made a difference in helping to maintain wetland values at sites across the Floodplain. They have contributed many hours of their own time at Gracemere Lagoon (Gracemere), Springers Lagoon (Gracemere) and Toonda Lagoon (Marmor) to help revegetate, control weeds and install fencing. Locals are encouraged to visit these wetland sites and enjoy all the wonderful values they have to offer.



A Conservation Volunteers Australia team helped revegetate Toonda Lagoon near Marmor by planting trees, shrubs and vines. (Photo courtesy FRCC)

Case study: Springers Lagoon

Springers Lagoon is located off Sullivan Road, Gracemere and is open to the public. The lagoon is a permanent waterhole that provides aquatic refuge for freshwater fish and other aquatic animals through the dry season and connects with other waterways during wet season flows. The lagoon also acts as a 'sink', catching excess nutrients, sediment and pesticides that run off from surrounding land which helps keep downstream ecosystems healthy. The local council and community organisations worked together in an effort to improve the health of the lagoon and the broader catchment by:

Planting native vegetation

A wide variety of native plant species are found at Springers Lagoon including blue gums, burdekin plums, cabbage palms, field lilies, and the grass silky browntop. The woodland on the south eastern bank of the lagoon provides shelter, food and breeding sites for wildlife. The tree roots hold the lagoon bank together to stop soil loss and their shade regulates water temperature. However, on the northern banks of the lagoon, there had been a loss of plant species with the ground layer dominated by the exotic pasture species Guinea Grass (which creates damaging hot fires), while the shrub and trees were limited and fragmented with only a thin line of Eucalypt, Casuarina and exotic Albizia trees remaining. To help restore the functionality of the ecosystem the local community helped plant a variety of native trees, shrubs and grasses.



Local people making a difference: volunteers planted native species at Springers Lagoon. (Photo courtesy FRCC)

Protecting remnant plant species

The remnant Blue Gum woodland includes a diversity of plant species and is home to many birds, insects and mammals. It is being protected by fencing, installed by a group of volunteers, to manage grazing pressure.



Members of the local community were part of a Conservation Volunteers Australia team that helped build a fence at Springers Lagoon. (Photo courtesy FRCC)

Weed control makes a difference

Targeted weed control also encourages the growth of native species. *Hymenachne* was beginning to invade the waterway, out-competing native water plants and contributing organic matter that reduces oxygen levels which could potentially cause fish kills within the lagoon. Woody weeds, such as chinee apple, found within the blue gum woodland were controlled by local government teams with help from volunteers.



Hymenachne weed infestations were treated at Springers Lagoon. (Photo courtesy FRCC)

Opportunities to learn about wetlands

Special interpretive signs have been installed so locals and tourists can learn more about this special place when they visit.



Interpretive signs at Springers Lagoon provide information about the wetland including photos of some of the birds and fish you are likely to find there. (Photo courtesy FRCC)

Getting mud between your toes ... become involved!

For private landholders who have wetlands on their property one of the best contributions that you can make is to protect your wetland's values to the best of your ability and in the case of degraded wetlands, endeavour to improve or rehabilitate them. Other information bulletins in this series may provide a source of potentially useful information to guide management initiatives.

For everyone else, you may consider joining a group that conducts activities related to your particular personal interests. Wetlands also provide an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors, participate in community events and volunteer time to make a positive change.

A few suggestions are:

- Want to be actively involved in looking after wetlands? Why not volunteer through groups such as Conservation Volunteers Australia or join your local Landcare/ Bushcare group.

- Interested in native vegetation? Join the Society for Growing Australian Native Plants.
- Join wildlife interest groups such as Birds Australia or the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Capricornia Branch.
- Join your local recreational fishing or fish stocking group and help champion the cause for improved management of freshwater fish habitats and fisheries.
- Get to know your local wetlands particularly those on public lands - get personally involved in planning for the improved management of a local wetland and obtain resources and muster others to help make a difference.



Duckponds Lagoon is located near Port Curtis on the outskirts of Rockhampton. (Photo courtesy FRCC)



Blacks Waterhole on Raglan Creek. (Photo courtesy FRCC)



Australian Government

The Queensland Wetlands Programme - Great Barrier Reef Coastal Wetlands Protection Programme is funded by the Australian Government. The main objective of the Southern Fitzroy Floodplain project was to engage land managers in activities and practices to help manage and enhance the area's important wetland values.

Queensland
Wetlands Programme

Further information

The information series is available on-line from the FRCC website or by request and includes Helping Wetlands, Fish, Fire, Grazing, Getting Involved and Waterbirds.



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