



# FriendsNET

Number 53 November 2005



Sue Wright – Convener  
of the Friends Network  
Committee 2003–5

## From your Network Committee Convener

As we reflect on the 11th Friends Conference held recently in the Grampians, some aspects are clear while others will need the combined input of all Network groups to clarify.

The certain aspects are the success of the Conference, the generosity of our hosts, the Friends of Grampians Gariwerd, the impressive venue and location, the program of presentations which kept everyone moving and thinking, and the constant hum of happy conversation as we renewed friendships and shared information and news.

At the Biennial General Meeting a number of matters were raised which the Committee

will now action. One was the direction of the Network and how it might develop. This is a complex question which we will address over the next months – we will be seeking your guidance and comments.

Another question is the location of the 2007 Friends Conference. Two groups have tentatively suggested their home ground as venues which we were thrilled to receive, but of course we would welcome other expressions of interest and ideas.

The next two years will certainly take us all in some very interesting directions.

## A few highlights from the 11th Friends Conference

Enclosed separately with this issue of FriendsNET is a summary of the whole Conference, for which we are most grateful to Bob Reid. However, here are just a couple of snippets from very inspirational presentations.

From lead speaker Dene Cordes, South Australia National Parks Community Liaison Officer

*I want to emphasise to you that successful community engagement involves two key words: 'CAN DO'. ...There is a need for respect for each other; a need to engage, rather than avoid ... Above all, these wonderful (volunteers), and the many worthy staff, need to enjoy their mutual work and surge ahead of the negatives. Please be inspired. Keep up your help to the planet in your local patch. Don't be put off. Always remember – 'CAN DO'.*

From lead speaker Charlie Sherwin, Director, VNPA

*We can do it; it's a matter of having the vision ... We can grab a vision for Victoria that says – we will look after every stick of native bush that remains and we will look after it as best it can possibly be looked after and we will get everyone to love it ... in a hundred years time I like to think you could look back at our work in the VNPA as a lobby group – your work on the ground – and say 'Wow, I wish I could have been there then'. We have a great opportunity. It is very exciting.*

And a few comments from some participants as reported in their group newsletters:

*I found it inspiring to see what other groups have done and to experience the remarkable commonality of approaches and problems ... The conference showed that Friends are healthy happy people working together because they enjoy it. (Bryan Loft – Friends of Dandenong Valley Parklands)*

*Ewen and Denice had a fantastic time at the Friends Conference and have decided that we are all going when the next one rolls around in two years. It was well organised with inspirational workshops and committed presenters. (Friends of Skeleton Creek & Altona Bay Wetlands)*

*The conference was very well run and we were so pleased to have made the effort to attend. We met a lot of people and had some interesting informal discussions. (Alice and Kevin Ley – Friends of Plenty River)*

*A very enjoyable weekend and a wonderful experience. Thank you to our hosts the Friends of Grampians/Gariwerd. (Allan Waterson and Daf Warren – Friends of Tower Hill)*



Participants in Ada Sabri's workshop on 'Expanding your membership'

# To mulch or not to mulch - is that the question?

Is mulching a cosmetic quick-fix cover-up that suppresses weeds in the short term but has longer term adverse consequences to the physical, biological and chemical character of the soil? If mulch suppresses weed regeneration does it also suppress natural regeneration of indigenous species? We asked Dr Peter May, Head of University of Melbourne – Burnley Campus, to give us some thoughts on the issue of mulching. This is his contribution.

## Using mulches in revegetation work

Research indicates that in many situations mulch is a highly valuable regeneration tool. However, use of inappropriate materials or not following basic guidelines in application can also lead to establishment failures.

### Why are mulches used?

The main uses of mulch are for weed suppression and/or for water conservation. Other uses include changing soil temperature (usually cooling, although clear plastic mulches are used to raise soil temperature) or improving soil physical conditions at the surface (such as water infiltration rate or soil particle aggregation).

### What kinds of materials are used as mulches?

1. Particulate This category includes gravel, sand, crushed rock, bark, compost, sawdust, straw and chipped green waste. In general, particulates are applied as reasonably thick layers. They are relatively easy to use and spread and are especially valuable for mulching around existing plants.

2. Sheet of film mulches These materials include paper, polyethylene film, woven weed mat, jute matting and carpet. Generally these are thin layers of material that are applied from rolls. They are efficient ways of covering large areas, but are most simple to use on clear sites where they do not have to negotiate existing plant material.

### Mulches in revegetation projects

I have seen most of the materials described above used in revegetation works at some time or other. All have their advantages and disadvantages. At present there is a large amount of chipped green waste available for use, largely coming from arboricultural activity. This material will be comprised of a mixture of species and may range from being quite woody to being quite leafy depending on source.

Given that the main reason for considering using mulch in revegetation works is for the suppression of weeds, can chipped prunings be used for this application?

Weed invasion of revegetation sites can come from two sources. One of these is the growth of weeds from propagules remaining in the soil at the time of planting. These propagules include seed and vegetative material (buried stems, bulbs and corms, rhizomes etc). They may also include the roots of plants that had been decapitated as part of the site clearing process. A thick layer of organic mulch can assist in reducing the germination of weed seeds by blocking the light that many species require for germination. However, organic mulch is generally less good at preventing vegetatively propagated weeds from establishing as these weeds have large reserves that can be used to push shoots up through the mulch layer. Sheet mulches do that job much better and plastic mulches are probably best for that purpose.

The other source of weeds is seed that comes to the site after planting. Examples would be wind blown or bird-carried seed. Research has shown that coarse textured mulches are best at minimising the growth of such seed, because the surface stays dry enough to reduce chances of germination. Research has also shown that a mulch layer of about 75 mm deep is about optimal for weed suppression. Layers of mulch thicker than this may lead to problems with soil aeration (the mulch keeps the soil too wet).

Organic mulches of this type have another advantage: as they decompose they enrich soil organic matter levels and improve soil conditions for plant growth. As the material decomposes, finer, leafy organic fractions are broken down to humus. Heavier, twiggy material will take longer to decompose and will be retained as a soil protective layer. On heavily degraded sites, chipped green waste can function as a replacement for the litter layer that would normally occur in undisturbed bushland. The presence of an organic layer on the soil surface will result in improved plant growth in many situations.

It is also worth remembering that chipped prunings can be a source of weed seed in their own right.

I have seen native seedlings come up in chipped tree pruning mulches at a couple of places and have often thought that using mulch as a vehicle for direct seeding would be an interesting experiment. (Anyone prepared to try? – Ed.)

Film or sheet mulches can also be very effectively used in revegetation projects, but can be unsightly. Black polyethylene, weed mat and jute mat have been shown to be very effective as weed suppression mulches. They are perhaps best used in sites that are particularly difficult, such as steep slopes, stream banks and sites with infestations of difficult perennial weeds. In the latter case, weed mat may be the best solution as it is difficult for resprouting weeds to penetrate the fabric and has reasonable permeability to oxygen and water. I remember seeing weed mat used very effectively in some early revegetation work along the Merri Creek where the site as heavily infested with fennel and kikuyu grass. The weed mat was able to suppress the weeds for long enough to allow very good growth of trees and shrubs along the creek.

A contentious issue is the use of black polyethylene as a mulch. While research shows it can work very well, there is also a body of opinion that suggests that it has deleterious effects on soil. And there is always a disposal problem. It is not being commonly used at the moment.

The ultimate choice of mulch material will be based on a combination of factors. No one material is perfect and understanding the properties, advantages and disadvantages of each is important before a decision is made. Good site preparation is very important and removal of as much weed material as possible before planting will also contribute to the success of mulch for weed suppression.

(Editor's note: Adam Muyt's very useful and relevant book *Bush Invaders of South-East Australia* also has section a section 'Mulches and smothering treatments' on page 43 in the chapter 'Environmental Weed Controls'.)

Please tell us about your experiences.

# Experience Exchange (your space)

Last issue, we featured an article on new Health & Safety Laws as they affect volunteers and their managing authorities. A number of groups have picked this up, focusing on recognising the risks or hazards their volunteers face, also on 'being prepared'.

Judy Douglas of Friends of Werribee Gorge & Long Forest Mallee writes:

Prompted by the August *FriendsNET* article highlighting the new Health and Safety laws, the Friends of WG&LFM discussed the content and relevancy of the Parks Victoria JSA forms. It was felt that some of our more obvious safety issues were not adequately addressed by the current form. The need to fill out/sign multiple forms was also questioned.

Our work in a rugged and remote location is often very physically demanding. With an aging membership the possibility of both heart attack and stroke can not be ignored. We also identified snake bite, dehydration, sunstroke/heat stress and just plain exhaustion as conditions Group members need to be vigilant about.

As a result of the discussion it was decided that Friends Group members be offered financial assistance to complete approved First Aid training. (Several members already have Workplace

Level 2 qualification). A General Purpose First Aid Kit, supplied from Ambulance Victoria, for use on Project Days has been purchased. The price of such kits is \$175.00.

Leon Costermans, of the Frankston Environmental Friends Network, reports that the twelve groups affiliated with this Network have also taken the initiative to work with their managers (Frankston Council and Parks Victoria) to identify the risks which the *groups* think are most relevant. They came up with very similar items to Judy's (left), but also things like sticks in eyes especially when weeding in burnt tea-tree areas. They are writing and distributing to their network groups their recommendations for good practices. Council is planning to make appropriate training and materials available, and the local Parks Victoria is providing protective goggles where needed.

Share your questions, experiences or ideas – contact a Committee member (see page 4)

## Matching volunteers

Patrick Moriarty of 'Our Community' has noted the column on volunteer matching in *FriendsNET* No 52 and emails: 'It would be great if at some time in the future you might mention the match facility at [www.ourcommunity.com.au/boards](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/boards)'.

What is your experience of matching volunteer services. Please let us know.

## Congratulations to four Best Friends for 2005!

This year's Best Friends were announced at the September Conference. Here are brief summaries of the citations.

**Zoe Hogg, Earth Care St Kilda** Zoe is a foundation member of the group and has been either President or Secretary since 1988. She has been involved in numerous foreshore projects, particularly the study and protection of the St Kilda Little Penguin colony. The citation refers to her 'great qualities of reliability, friendliness, quick-thinking and humour'. The award was presented by Geoff Durham, Friends Network Committee, at the St Kilda Ecocentre on the occasion of Zoe's 70th birthday celebration.

**Lance and Judith Lewis, Friends of Brisbane Ranges** As foundation members of the group, Lance and Judith have been regular participants for 23 years, including the role of group historians. Judith's specialty has been in the Park's wildflowers, while Lance has been the organiser of physical tasks. The dynamic pair are known as the 'grandparents' of the group. The award was presented at the 11th Conference by Brett Cheatley, Regional Manager West, Parks Victoria. In response Judith said "We just come and enjoy ourselves".

**Margaret Medley, Friends of French Island** The group was formed in 1984, and Margaret has been treasurer since its foundation. She has been responsible for obtaining many grants which have enabled members to participate in ambitious and valuable projects. She is an active participant in all activities, and also encourages younger members. The citation refers to her 'generosity, loyalty, love of the island and years of hard work.' The award was presented on French Island on 8 October by Margaret Boyd (Friends Network Committee).



## And Best Friends for 2006?

Nominations for the 2006 Award close at the end of December 2005. Have you a member who meets the criterion for the Award?

*'An outstanding contribution through exceptional dedication as a Friend'*

Note that *both* an outstanding contribution *and* exceptional dedication are required. This will usually involve constant honorary involvement in the work of the group for at least ten years. Nominations must be made by the relevant Friends Group. Nomination Forms are available from the VNPA office or may be downloaded from our Web site: [home.vicnet.net.au/~friends](http://home.vicnet.net.au/~friends)



Geoff Durham  
is the Network's  
Group Liaison Officer

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## Geoff's Group Grapevine

The Department of Sustainability & Environment has eventually released *Volunteering Naturally – a review of volunteer programs in natural resources in Victoria*. Some of the findings of the survey done in 2001–02 are: An estimated 56,000 volunteers worked in programs associated with the Department in the environment/ animal welfare field. Males comprised 56.5% of the volunteers and the average age was 51 years. 26% were aged 45–54 and 6% aged 18–24. 90% of volunteering occurred within a group structure and on average each volunteer contributed 230 hours annually. The value of the volunteers at \$15/hour was estimated at \$180 million at a staff cost of \$6.2 million. Not bad value!

I note from the Newsletter of the Bayside Friends of Native Wildlife that their diary commences with a reminder: Don't forget suitable footwear, clothing and UV protection. The Friends of South Surrey Park in their diary say: The committee advises volunteers that you attend park activities at your own risk.

It was great to be part the formation of the Friends of Terrick Terrick National Park when over 40 people, including good representation of local farmers and scientists/naturalists, camped in the park on 1–2 October. Terrick Terrick at Mitiamo features Pine–Box woodlands and remarkable grasslands. We saw several Plains Wanderers. For information about the group contact Bernie Fox 9741 9859.

The Victorian High Country Huts Association has produced a 2006 calendar featuring David Oldfield's black and white photographs of 12 huts. Available through their web site: [www.vhcha.org.au](http://www.vhcha.org.au) (\$12.00 including postage).

### And we welcome ...

Friends of Clematis Creek  
Clematis Creek runs through Belgrave and is managed by Melbourne Water. The group is restoring indigenous vegetation. Contact: Rosemary Dale 9754 8641

Friends of Edwards Point State Faunal Reserve  
Edwards Point is on Port Phillip Bay, Lower Bluff, St Leonards. Formed in 1996, they 'assist Parks Victoria in the management (seed collection, weeding, planting) of the reserve'. Contact: John Knight 5257 2258

Friends of Errinundra  
A recently formed group for for the Errinundra area in East Gippsland. Contact: Michelle Farran 035 154 0110

Friends of Mt Jeffcott  
This new group supports Mt Jeffcott Flora and Fauna Reserve at Donald. Contact: Leo Tellefson 5497 2254

Friends of Reform Hill  
Involved with the historic sites, walking tracks and recreational/educational aspects of Reform Hill, Myrtleford. Contact: John Taylor 5752 1963

Friends of Ruffey Lake Park  
This new group for Ruffey Lake Park at Doncaster aims to 'work together with all management authorities in a positive manner and maintain a healthy relationship with those authorities and the surrounding community'. Contact: Tom Dowsley 9846 7601

Friends of Toolern Creek  
Recently formed and working to improve the Toolern Creek environment at Melton through vegetation initiatives. Contact: Lyn Holdsworth 9747 0525

Friends of Swipers Gully Creek  
This new group will 'protect and enhance the natural environment of Swipers Gully Creek' – a small creek at Research in the City of Nillumbik that does not appear in Melways. Contact: Marian Weaving 9437 1954.

Friends of Zumsteins  
Incorporated in 1997, the aims of this group are to develop the Walter & Jean Zumstein Memorial Garden at Zumsteins in the Grampians, to feature the plants of the area and clear exotic weeds. Contact: Royce Raleigh 5383 6200

## Friends Network Committee for 2005-07

Members of the new committee elected at the Conference are: Margaret Boyd, Sean Carter, Geoff Durham, Judy Hindle, Maelor Himbury, Tony Woolford and Sue Wright. In accordance with the Committee's constitution, a VNPA

nominee will be co-opted to the Committee and there is one other vacancy which the committee can fill by co-option. The committee appoints from its members a Convener and other office bearers.

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If undelivered, return to:  
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