

13 March 2008

HANDS ON LEARNING ON SUSTAINABLE GRAZING FIELD TRIP

It was hands-on learning for forty-five people who undertook a field trip to Fowlers Gap Research Station and Langawirra Station yesterday as part of the Sustainable Grazing Forum 2008 being held in Broken Hill this week.

A further twenty participants will take part in lecture-style presentations today. The Forum is being hosted by the Western Catchment Management Authority (CMA) with additional financial support from the Lower-Murray Darling CMA.

Western CMA Community Support Officer and forum organiser, Melinda Fletcher, said she was very happy with the first day's activities.

"My aim for the forum was to look at the environment we live and work in from the point of view of the geology, soils, plants and animals and to recognise that they are all interconnected and the management of each element needs to be part of a property's grazing system," Ms Fletcher said.

The journey to Fowlers Gap Research Station featured commentaries by experts on geology, soil and local history. While at the Research Station, people were able to observe vegetation change and natural banding, discuss the ecology of our saltbushes and trends in the Rangeland Assessment Program (RAP) since the early 1990s.

Soil carbon expert, John Lawrie of the Central-West CMA, gave an easy to understand explanation of the potential of soil carbon credits for landholders and outlined four major principles to benefit soil carbon increases in the far-west. These were increasing groundcover, increasing perennial plants, increasing biodiversity and decreasing disturbance.

"The idea of cultivating carbon as an income source is very new, but it's one option for landholders to consider and may be an additional incentive to adopt the four principles that are beneficial for the landscape," Ms Fletcher said.

Highlights of the field-site at Langawirra Station included visiting a rangeland restoration project and a demonstration by Lachie Gall of Langawirra Station of managing invasive native scrub with a crocodile machine, which for many landholders was the first time they'd seen one in action.

James Val of the Department of Environment and Climate Change showed a range of animals caught the previous night using pit-fall traps, including two fat-tailed dunnarts, striped skinks, scorpions and legless lizards to demonstrate the variety of animals found in the rangelands.

Alex James of NSW University spoke about her research into the roles goanna and echidna holes play in aiding vegetation growth. Their holes collect litter and store rainfall, which make them ideal sites for germinating plants.

David Eldridge of the Department of Environment and Climate Change conducted an experiment using a disk permeameter to very graphically demonstrate the role vegetation plays in assisting



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the soil's ability to absorb moisture. Water infiltrated the soil far more readily around plants, due to the channels left by the plant's roots in comparison to the bare soil.

Tas Clarke of Kayrunnera Station said he has found the forum very useful so far.

"Everywhere we went I learnt something new or heard about something I hadn't considered before.

"I was particularly interested in the talk from Peter Jessop of the Department of Primary Industries about the need to supplement perennial plants like saltbush and bluebush as a feed source to help with digestion and energy conversion.

"I've noticed myself that when I provide a supplement like molophos the sheep have a lot more energy and instead of hanging around the water point they move off, which has benefits for the country as well.

"Knowing that the science backs up what I've noticed myself gives me a lot of confidence that I'm doing the right thing," Mr Clarke said.

Today the Forum consists of presentations from nine rangeland officers including Ron Hacker, Gemma Junk, Genevieve Carruthers, Robyn Neeson, Greg Curran and Steve McLeod, who will cover a range of topics from a review of grazing practices and infrastructure, Environmental Management Systems to organics and animal nutrition issues.

Representatives from the Western and Lower-Murray Darling CMAs will outline each of their organisation's Catchment Plans and funding opportunities for landholders through their Incentives Program. The Western CMA's 2008 Incentive Program was officially launched at Fowlers Gap by General Manger, Daryl Green, in sight of a stand of rare Curly Mallee protected by fencing funding through last year's program. Applications for funding will be accepted until April 30.

Ms Fletcher says Friday is an optional half-day which allows participants to tailor the information received to their property.

"They can undertake one-on-one discussions with the some of the speakers and CMA staff and can use mapping, modelling and software to develop a sustainable grazing plan for their farm business.

"I really appreciate the time and effort people have put into coming along and hope that when they go home they might look at their paddocks differently and take more notice of what they have," she said.

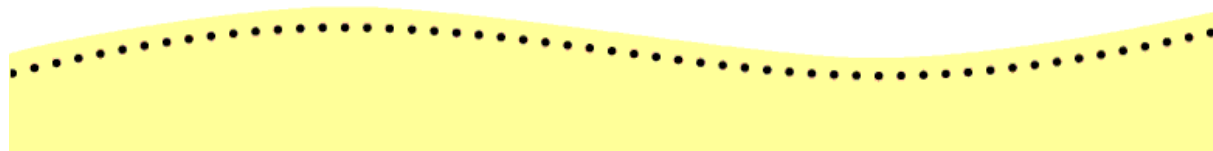
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Further information: ON MOBILE ONLY THIS WEEK

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Caption:



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Eldridge: David Eldridge of DECC uses a disc permeameter to demonstrate soil's capacity to absorb moisture.

Val: James Val of DECC shows a skink captured in a pit-fall trap to demonstrate the biodiversity of the site.

Jackson_Mannion_White:

Forum participants, Matt Jackson of Rowena Station, Paul Mannion of Nundora Station and Angus White of Marrapina

Fletcher_Molesworth:

Forum organiser, Melinda Fletcher of the Western CMA with participants Anika and Lindy Molesworth of Rupee Station.

Gall_Crocodile:

Lachie Gall of Langawirra Station outlines the features of his crocodile machine before demonstrating its use.

Lawrence_Clarke:

Forum participants, Mark Lawrence of Kara Station and Tas Clarke of Kayrunnera Station.

Jackson_Hayes:

Forum participants, David Jackson of Billila Station near Wilcannia with Bob Hayes of Box Vale Station.

