



March 2014

Work team moves west

As we get further into 2014 our weed control work program expands and moves further west. While still focusing on woody weed control, landholder education, protection of significant species and sites, and improvements in water quality, DCQ is also keen to develop longer term and more cost effective methods.

We are already using lower cost diesel alternatives in spraying, and this new work in the west of the region, which brings together a number of projects in a focused area, provides us with the opportunity to further trial methods such as misters and splatter guns.

The on ground component of this woody weed control is funded by the Queensland State Government, with complementary funding from the Federal Government for landholder education and on-ground trials aimed at long term sustainable agriculture.

This current Prickly Acacia control project covers 170,000 hectares across nine properties on Wokingham Creek and the upper Diamantina. Its five year plan of works centres on the 25 year old Wokingham Landcare Group and neighbouring properties, and while significant gains in the long term war on weeds has seen large areas of some properties free of Prickly Acacia, there are still heavy infestations, particularly along depression lines, which reduce biodiversity and grass production.

Historically, landholders have used a variety of control methods including foliar and basal bark spraying, stock and grazing management and mechanical, and the greatest success has been where they have approached woody weed control as a long term activity integrated into their daily work routines.

This has still left challenging infestations, and the primary control works under this program are targetting areas that are seed producing, difficult to access, beyond the scale of the landholders, and of high public benefit (such as in the rivers and creeks). These works are supported by landholders expanding the control area outward in a planned sequence.

In work to date, we have mapped the properties in detail and, working with the landholders, prioritised the areas for control. Our work team has already started on the Year 1 target of 9,426 hectares of dense and ultra-dense infestations. This work will be supported by landholder efforts on a further 65,000 hectares.

Stay tuned to the pages of Upfront Outback for regular updates on progress.

R&D never sleeps

DCG has never been an organisation to tread water, mark time, or rest on its laurels; we're always looking for better, cheaper, faster, smarter ways of doing things.

If you're a regular reader of Upfront Outback, you will know about our filtering of used cooking oil as a diesel alternative in weed spraying. We now have our production rates up to 1,000 litres per day (depending on the supply), and are trialling it on woody weeds as well as cactus, and field testing a range of other control techniques and materials we've been working on.

We have also accelerated operational mister trials, and training for landholders who have misters. In a departure from previous trials we are moving away from Starane and trialling, under permit, alternative chemicals for mister application. Our team is driven, not only by getting the job done, but by finding the most effective way of doing it.

As well as deploying equipment to improve the efficiency of foliar spraying, we have been working in conjunction with the Queensland Government through the DCQ Area Management Plan on refining weed control techniques that ensure native vegetation is protected.

Our current research and development program also includes the assessment of the use of the splatter gun in eroded gully sites, the use of camels and goats, stock movement controls, the application of Tebuthiuron based residual products for regrowth control, as well as mechanical control.

If you would like to know more about these weed control activities, phone Peter Spence on 4652 7827.

Airborne again!

One project which always gets a lot of interest is our aerial feral pig control. We have been running feral pig control programs in the lower reaches of our inland rivers for the past three years in an effort to stop feral pigs from reaching the sensitive wetlands of the Ramsar listed Coongie Lakes in north-eastern South Australia.

By the end of 2013, our teams had removed 24,000 feral pigs from the Copper Creek, Diamantina and Georgina river systems. These major aerial shoots built on smaller shoots conducted by landholders in the area, as well as control activities within South Australia.

With the dry weather of the last 12 months, natural attrition has seen feral pig numbers dramatically reduced, but recent rain and small flows in the river systems have improved breeding conditions. Our monitoring and mapping work, aerial surveys and feedback from landholders indicates the population now has potential to rapidly increase. To counter this, we are restarting short duration, localised culling programs.

The first of these began in early March, south of Windorah, with a three day shoot to eradicate residual pigs.

As intimated above, our monitoring sites form an important part of our intelligence gathering system. Based on waterholes throughout far western Queensland, these provide an early warning about changes in feral pig densities. We also conduct aerial surveys every four years to validate our assumptions on population numbers.

While DCQ conducts the largest feral pig control program, many individual properties in the lower Lake Eyre Basin also have their own culling programs. These programs act in concert to protect important wetlands downstream, and are a great example of the community working together to achieve both production and environmental goals.

Weed Watch

Sending your stock on agistment, or importing fodder, during a drought are vital to the survival of valuable livestock; however, a potential downside raises its head when the rain finally comes ... weeds!

Drought not only creates the conditions to warrant agistment and feeding, it creates the ideal conditions for accidentally introduced weed seeds to flourish with the rain ... bare ground!

Bare ground is the perfect 'blank canvas' for invasive plant species: there is no competition for light, nutrients, moisture or space; in short fast growing weeds have a free reign.

Any fodder that has been transported from other areas potentially harbours weed seeds. And the recent welcome rains may have enabled some of those weed seeds to germinate in your paddocks.

A particularly invasive weed of bare disturbed areas is Parthenium. Parthenium costs the beef industry \$16.5 million per year, and cropping industries several million dollars per year (Dept of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry). Parthenium weed is a declared Class 2 pest plant under Queensland legislation and a Weed of National Significance (WONS). In summer, Parthenium can flower and set seed within four weeks of germination, particularly if stressed.

Once a weed has entered an area and become established, eradication is far more expensive, and greater resources will be required to control its spread and reduce its impact.

Steps to take to avoid weed infestations:

- Keep a close eye on areas where drought fodder has been fed to livestock;
- Restrict the movement of livestock, including those returning from agistment, to a quarantine area (small paddock that can be monitored closely for subsequent weed germination) for at least 2 weeks;
- Get unknown plants identified early, before they become established and set seed on your property (Weedspotter Coordinator for the Desert Channels region, Helen Cross, can assist with identification);
- Get onto an emerging weed problem as soon as possible so you don't regret it later; and
- Contact Desert Channels Group for advice on control methods.

For more information, call Helen Cross on 4652 7829.

Images of passion

Long considered the doyen of Australian freshwater fish photographers, Gunther Schmida is also regarded as one of the best frog and reptile photographers and writers in the country.

His images have graced the pages of over 500 publications, including innumerable cover shots, and his articles have been published in eight languages in 23 magazines worldwide.

Wildlife photography and writing have always been his passion and, now that he has retired from his real job, he has decided to turn his inspiring images and informative writing into easily accessible e-books.

Specifically designed for the horizontal format of the computer screen, Gunther Schmida's e-books are saturated with his brilliant colour photographs, along with accurate and up to date information on Australia's freshwater fish, reptiles and frogs.

This 26 volume series is a treat for wildlife lovers in particular, but also for anyone who appreciates excellent photography and our unique wildlife.

Visit www.guntherschmida.com.au or email ggg32@bigpond.com; you won't be disappointed!