wheatbelt natural resource management

Issue 15 Autumn 2012

newsletter

Djeran - Makuru

How resilient is the Wheatbelt?

Arial view of the Lockhart river

How resilient are our industries and natural environment to the challenges facing the Avon Region in the coming decades?

What will be the impact of cumulative pressures on agriculture and our natural environment from a changing climate, tightening labour and financial markets, and ongoing environmental issues including salinity and declining water quality and soil health?

How will increase pressure on agricultural land, changing populations and potential landuse change within our region impact our natural environment including our lakes and river systems?

How will the continued emergence of mining as an economic force within our region impact the local economy and in turn the management of our natural resources?

How can we best prepare ourselves for the range of future shocks that we will inevitably face over the coming decades?

These are just some of the questions posed by the current review of the Wheatbelt NRM strategy. Over the next 6 months regional community groups and other stakeholders will be asked to contribute to our understanding of the Wheatbelt environment during this strategy review.

Wheatbelt NRM believes it is important to understand and manage environmental issues in concert with an understanding of associated social, economic and governance issues, and to address the causes of these environmental issues in partnership with other organisations.

Our approach will aim to tell us which systems are most in danger of irreversible decline OR need to change to a more desirable state.

Wheatbelt NRM will examine the WA Wheatbelt landscape as a social-ecological system in order to update the Wheatbelt NRM Strategy. To enable this, Wheatbelt NRM is keen to establish partnerships with system thinkers and engage community thinking to unravel the Wheatbelt system dynamics.

For more information or if you would like to contribute to this review please contact Dr Elizabeth Kington on 9690 2232 or email ekington@wheatbeltnrm.org.au

By Matt Giraudo, Wheatbelt NRM Consultant

CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY

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THE GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Wheatbelt strategic plan call for input

Nyungar Seasons

Djeran
April- May

Becoming cooler with winds from the south-west

Makuru
June - July

Cold and wet with westerly gales

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Issue 15, Autumn 2012

Designed, edited and produced by Wheabelt NRM

Dear readers,

Please be reminded that we will be developing our strategic plan for 2012-2015 in the next couple of months.

As a community organisation it is very important for us to receive your input, as in many ways, we are dependent on each other for mutual success. The link below to our survey of 7 questions should take 10 -15 minutes to complete. We would really like to hear what you have to say if you have not already. The Wheatbelt NRM Board will be meeting at the end of March and your responses will be compiled for them as an input to the strategy planning process.

www.surveymonkey.com/s/MLXLKZC

Members and associates are being asked to complete this survey, however input from the community is highly regarded.

We will be presenting the Strategic Plan at the AGM, but plan to have it developed by June.

Kind regards,

Wheatbelt NRM

Nyungar Budjar Carers

Wheatbelt NRM has recenty employed two Nyungar Budjar Carer Trainees. Judd Davis (left) and Brandon Colbung (right). The two trainees will be completing their Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management along with on the job training by assisting the Aboriginbal NRM team.

Judd is 16 years old and has recently completed year 10 at Northam Senior High School having moved to Northam from Perth two years ago. Judd previously assisted his pop, Nyungar Elder Kevan Davis, with a traditional burn off at the Korrelocking Reserve. His enjoyment for the outdoors and being in the bush originally enticed him to the role and he is looking forward to being out on country.

Brandon Colbung will also assist the Aboriginal NRM team with conservation activities around the region. Brandon has recently moved to Northam after living in Quairading and though only 17 years old has managed to travel to a number of spots around the Great Southern region. He has developed a keen interest in the Western Australian environment and is eager to work on country to conserve the Wheatbelt landscape.

Farmers are true Wheatbelt Champions

By Dr David Grasby, Project Manager Sustainable Agriculture

We all know that it takes someone special to farm in the Wheatbelt, but do you know of anyone who you would describe as a true "Champion Farmer"? Do they continue to inspire you and your fellow farmers to farm sustainably in these increasingly challenging times?

Well, if you do, then we here at Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management want to know about them!

A "Champion Farmer" will be one who has taken steps to reduce soil erosion and improve soil quality on their own properties and who also inspire other farmers to adopt similar practices.

They could be someone who has:

- Applied innovative cropping methods to reduce erosion and increase soil carbon
- Improved the health of their soil through innovative farming practices
- Integrated perennial grasses and fodder shrubs into their grazing systems
- Strategically used tree crops and revegetation to enhance the resilience of their farms

If you know of a farmer who you describe as a Champion Farmer then please nominate them as one of our "Wheatbelt Champions".

Farmers chosen will have an important role in a Sustainable Agriculture Conference that will be held in the WA Wheatbelt and will draw together people involved in Wheatbelt NRM's sustainable agriculture program, the broader community and industry to share knowledge and lessons learnt for improving soil health in the Wheatbelt.

Nominations for "Wheatbelt Champions" can be made by visiting www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au and completing the online registration form.

For further information please contact Project Manager Dr David Grasby on 9690 2292 or dgrasby@wheatbeltnrm.org.au

Have you got healthy gums?

By Julia Murphy, Greening Australia (WA)

Greening Australia and Wheatbelt NRM are currently looking for a range of trial sites to improve the regeneration and condition of Eucalyptus Woodlands and Mallees. These sites are part of a practical and applied research project that we are delivering until June 2013.

Why are we running this trial?

Most conservation and landcare funding allows for the fencing of remnant vegetation to reduce the impact of grazing, however; many fenced remnants often require further management to encourage natural regeneration. This project aims to trial treatments to determine what 'triggers' are required to stimulate the regeneration of woodlands / mallees. We will trial these treatments to assess if practical, cost-effective restoration actions can be achieved for remnants in the Wheatbelt.

We are looking for a range of sites including those with:

i) Degraded understorey but intact overstorey

ii) Remnants that may have had a section cleared and / or worked but have since been abandoned

iii) Any other sites that contain remnant (not planted) Eucalyptus that may respond to restoration treatments

We are also looking for sites with any type of remnant Eucalyptus ie Salmon Gum, Gimlet, Wandoo, Mallees or a mix to implement this Winter, and we will ideally be looking to short-list and assess a range of sites in March/ April.

If you either have, or know of a suitable site please contact Julia at Greening Australia on 0429 998 911 or jmurphy@gawa.org.au

We are looking for:

i) remnant sites that have well defined cleared areas within them – can be in the middle or elsewhere .

ii) sites that have open patches within the remnant

Successful BushCare Grants Announced

York Gum woodland showing grazed and ungrazed on each side of the fence Photo: Mick Davis/WWF

10 landholders from across the Avon have been successful in being awarded funding to fence and manage their bushland for conservation purposes. A further seven applicants are in-line to receive additional funding, based upon review of their applications. In total more than $143,000 was awarded for environmental projects through the 2012 BushCare Grants, which were funded via the Australian Governments Caring For our Country program.

Most projects were aimed at fencing remnant vegetation to manage stock access and improve on-ground management actions, with some projects also involving revegetation activities.

'This is the second year Wheatbelt NRM has opened the BushCare Grants – and about 50% of applicants were successful' says Mick Davis, Wheatbelt NRM's Biodiversity Program Coordinator and Landcare Facilitator.

'These projects will see the protection of a diverse range of habitats and threatened species, for which the wheatbelt is nationally and internationally renowned' Mick says. 'The high number of applicants this year demonstrates that wheatbelt landholders are keen to do what they can to protect the natural assets that occur in their backyards'

In addition to private landholders being funded, Kulin District High School was successful in receiving funds to support their students' environmental curriculum by collecting, growing and planning revegetation of a nearby patch of bushland.

Colin Fergusson, Deputy Principal at Kulin DHS, says 'Our BushCare grant was part of an initiative devised by Mrs Adrianne Waters, English teacher, and myself, to engage the secondary students in environmental and sustainability issues. At Kulin DHS, once we have an idea that can enhance the learning of our students, we get to it'.

Project works will begin across the Avon in the next few months, including installation of fencing around bushland, seed collection and undertaking preliminary weed control at revegetation sites.

Those applicants who were not successful are encouraged to contact their local Natural Resource Management Officer or Wheatbelt NRM to discuss the potential to re-apply for funding from other funding opportunities that are now available.

'Wheatbelt NRM is keen to support anyone in the wheatbelt who wants to protect the natural values in their area' says Mick. 'Although we couldn't fund everyone who applied, we have access to a wide support network to aid the community in achieving their environmental goals'.

Mick can be contacted on 0428 969 096 or mdavis@wheatbeltnrm.org.au

Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI)

By Georgie Chrimes, Project Manager Sustainable Agriculture

Information obtained from the Australian Governments CFI webpage: www.climatechange.gov.au/cfi

FACTS

Australia is the Number 1 Ranked emitter globally per capita

The Australian Government's long-term goal is to reduce emissions by 60% below 2000 levels by 2050

Greenhouse gases regulate our current Earth climate - it is the rapid increase in the greenhouse gases which has adverse impacts on climate

Agriculture accounts for approximately. 15% of Australia's 2010 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

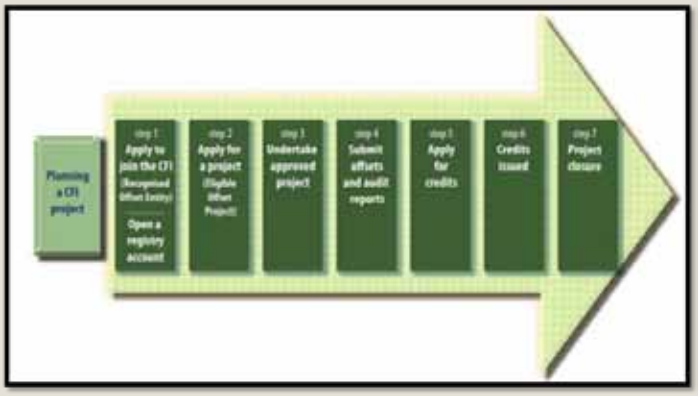
1 tonne of carbon avoidance or sequestration is eligible for 1 Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCU)

The Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI) allows farmers and land managers to earn carbon credits by storing carbon or reducing greenhouse gas emissions on the land. These credits can then be sold to people and businesses wishing to offset their emissions.

The CFI also helps the environment by encouraging sustainable farming and providing a source of funding for landscape restoration projects.

Participation in the CFI is voluntary; farmers and landholders can choose whether or not to be involved.

The CFI is a carbon offsets scheme that is part of Australia's carbon market. Legislation to underpin the CFI was passed by Parliament on 23 August 2011. The CFI scheme has now commenced and is operational.



There are seven key steps to participating in the Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI). These are illustrated in the figure above and explained further on relevant pages on this website. Before applicants apply to join the CFI or lock in a business model and funding arrangements, it is recommended that they become familiar with the scheme design and their obligations.

ELIGIBLE & EXCLUDED ACTIVITIES

The Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI) allows landholders to earn carbon credits for reducing emissions or storing carbon on their land.

For an activity to be eligible under the CFI, it must:

- be within the scope of the CFI
- be covered by an approved CFI methodology
- be on the positive list, and
- not be on the negative list.

Individual projects must also comply with other scheme requirements, including having the necessary water, planning and environmental approvals from all levels of government.

SCOPE OF THE CFI

The following four types of projects could be eligible under the CFI, provided they are covered by a methodology, on the positive list and not on the negative list.

Agricultural emissions avoidance projects

Projects that avoid emissions of:

a. methane from the digestive tract of livestock

b. methane or nitrous oxide from the decomposition of livestock urine or dung

Continued on next page

Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI)

c. methane from rice fields or rice plants

d. methane or nitrous oxide from the burning of savannas or grasslands

e. methane or nitrous oxide from the burning of crop stubble in fields, crop residues in fields or sugar cane before harvest

f. methane or nitrous oxide from soil.

Landfill legacy emissions avoidance projects

Projects that avoid emissions of greenhouse gases from the operation of a landfill facility, to the extent to which the emissions are attributable to waste accepted by the facility before 1 July 2012.

Introduced animal emissions avoidance projects

Projects that avoid emissions of methane from the digestive tract of an introduced animal or emissions of methane or nitrous oxide from the decomposition of introduced animal urine or dung.

Sequestration offsets projects

Projects that remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere by sequestering carbon in living biomass, dead organic matter or soil; or remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere by sequestering carbon in, and avoid emissions of greenhouses gases from, living biomass, dead organic matter or soil.

POSITIVE LIST

The Positive List identifies activities that are deemed to go beyond common practice in the relevant industry or environment. The positive list guidelines contain further information about the positive list and instructions for proposing activities for inclusion on the positive list. The Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI) includes an additionality test to ensure that carbon credits generated by CFI projects can genuinely offset the emissions produced by the person who buys the credit. To pass the additionality test, a project must not be required by law and the activity must be on the positive list.

The positive list is contained in the Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Regulations 2011 . The information below is not a substitute for these regulations and is provided for guidance only. The regulations for the positive list will change over time as new activities are assessed and added.

Vegetation and wetland restoration projects

- The establishment of permanent plantings on or after 1 July 2007.
- The human-induced regeneration, on or after 1 July 2007, of native vegetation, on land that is not conservation land by the:
  - i. exclusion of livestock, or
  - ii. management of the timing and the extent of grazing, or
  - iii. management, in a humane manner, of feral animals, or
  - iv. management of plants that are not native to the project area, or
  - v. cessation of mechanical or chemical destruction, or suppression, of regrowth.
- The restoration, on land that is not conservation land, of natural wetlands that had been drained.
- A forestry project accredited under the Australian Government's Greenhouse FriendlyTM initiative.
- Permanent plantings projects accredited under the:
  - a. New South Wales Government's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Scheme, or
  - b. Australian Capital Territory Government's Greenhouse Gas Abatement scheme.
- Permanent plantings established before 1 July 2007 for which there is documentary evidence that demonstrates, to the satisfaction of the Administrator, that the primary purpose of the plantings was generation of carbon offsets.

Legacy landfill gas projects

- The capture and combustion of methane from waste deposited in a landfill facility before 1 July 2012.
- Until 1 July 2012, a waste diversion project accredited under the Australian Government's Greenhouse FriendlyTM initiative.

Livestock management and other activities

- The capture and combustion of methane from livestock manure.
- The reduction of emissions from ruminants by manipulation of their digestive processes.
- The reduction of methane emissions through the management, in a humane manner, of feral goats, feral deer, feral pigs or feral camels.
- The application of urease or nitrification inhibitors to, or with, livestock manure or fertiliser.
- The application of biochar to soil.
- Early dry season burning of savanna areas greater than 1km2.

Continued on next page

Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI)

NEGATIVE LIST

The Negative List describes activities and the circumstances under which they are excluded from the CFI. Some activities are only excluded in circumstances where no risk mitigation options exist to reduce the adverse impact of the activity. Projects on the negative list are not eligible under the CFI.

The following kinds of projects are excluded offsets projects as at 8 December 2011:

- A project that:
    - i. was mandated under a law of the Commonwealth or a state or territory, and
    - ii. is no longer mandatory because the law was repealed after 24 March 2011.
- The planting of a species in an area where it is a known weed species.
- The establishment of a forest under a forestry managed investment scheme for Division 394 of Part 3–45 of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997.
- The cessation or avoidance of the harvest of a plantation.
- The establishment of vegetation on land that has been subject to illegal clearing of a native forest, or illegal draining of a wetland.
- The establishment of vegetation on land that has been subject to clearing of a native forest, or draining of a wetland (that was not an illegal clearing or draining), within:
    - i. seven years of the lodgement of an application for the project to be declared an eligible offsets project, or
    - ii. if there is a change in ownership of the land that constitutes the project area, after the clearing or the draining—five years of the lodgement of an application for the project to be declared an eligible offsets project.
- Specified tree planting in an area that, according to the CFI rainfall map, receives more than 600 mm long-term average annual rainfall, unless it is mentioned in the subregulations.

Australia's carbon price mechanism

Australia's carbon price mechanism will start in July 2012 with a fixed carbon price of $23/tCO2-e, rising at 2.5 per cent per year until 2014–15. This is known as the fixed price period.

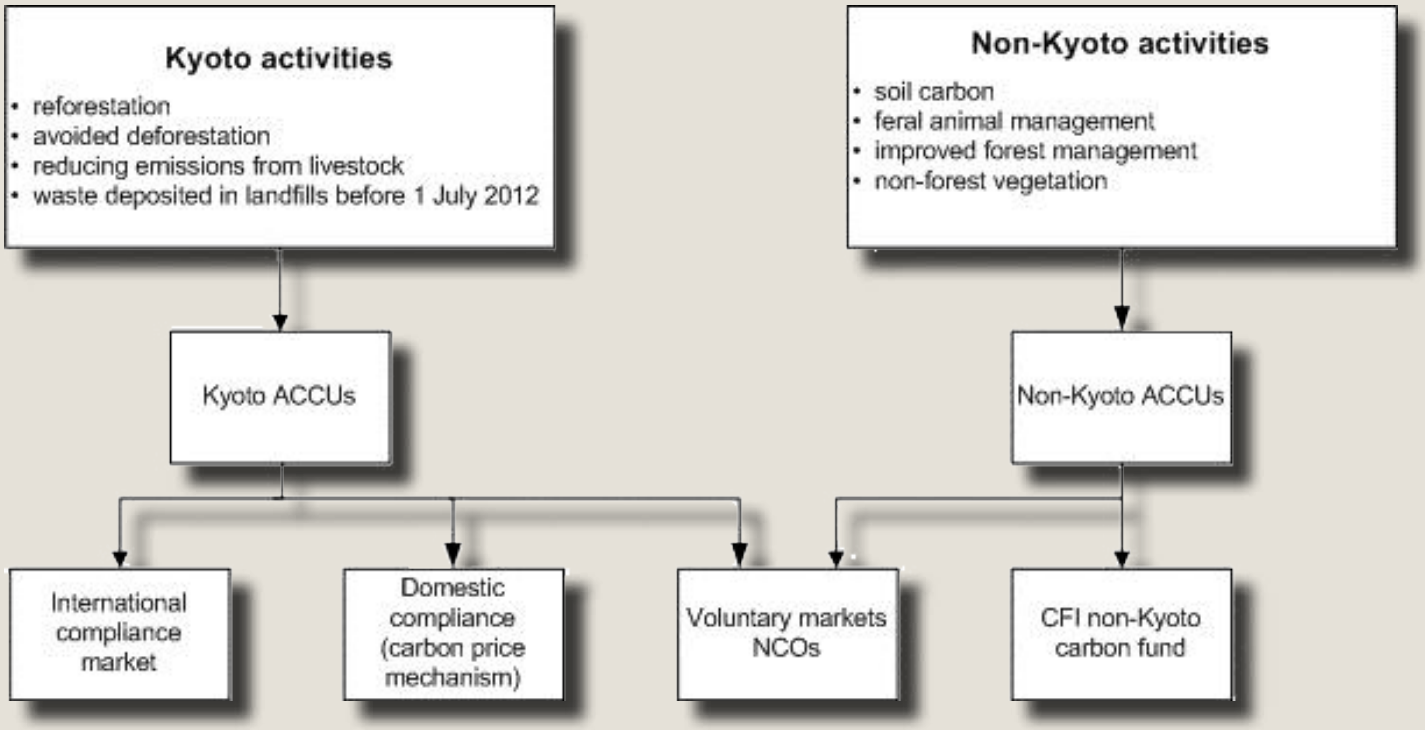
In the fixed price period, businesses can use Kyoto or compliance ACCUs to offset up to five per cent of their carbon price liabilities. Landfill operators can use Kyoto or compliance ACCUs to offset 100 per cent of their carbon price liability.

A carbon price will not apply to agricultural emissions.

In the flexible price period, which commences in 2015, the Australian Government will allocate and auction a fixed number of carbon permits and the carbon price will be set by the market. From the start of the flexible price period, liable companies can meet up to half of their obligations using credible abatement from overseas or Kyoto or compliance ACCUs. There is no limit on the use of ACCUs.

To limit price spikes and plunges in the flexible price period, there will be a price ceiling and a price floor. Australia will have a price cap starting $20 higher than the expected international price, and a price floor starting at $15/ tCO2-e.

Figure 1: Types of activities and where you can trade your credits.



Growing and managing Swamp sheoak for multi-purpose land-use

1. Prior to thinning and typical of what is seen on farms

2. 6 months after thinning shows pasture & coppice regrowth from stumps with stacked drying firewood logs

By Bob Hingston, Farm Forestry Development Officer DAFWA

Depending on their land-use objectives landowners who have natural stands or dense patches of Casuarina obesa (Swamp sheoak) on their land may have an opportunity to manage them for multiple-use. This article offers a few ideas for landowners to consider using some basic forestry skills to thin their sheoaks with positive spinoffs.

Although the idea of "cutting trees down" may not appeal to some participants in the Land for Wildlife Scheme, there are positive land use options that may appeal to some.

Obviously if you have purely conservation objectives in mind this may seem a crazy idea to some but in farm forestry we look at the holistic and multiple use objectives from our farmland bush or revegetation projects. I do not apologise for this as landowners have native bush or grow trees for many reasons.

Thinning is used to maximise the growth of retained trees by removing competition and providing extra space and soil moisture. Without thinning, swamp sheoak with tree densities of up to 30,000 trees/ha, will never grow to a large size but remain small ie, 1-15cm diameter.

Thinning dense stands of swamp sheoak can provide short-term income from the sale of tool handles, wood turning, fire wood or fence posts whilst promoting the diameter growth on the retained trees. We all know how tough farming was last year, so alternative income may be welcome to some who need to diversify their income stream.

If thinned these dense blocks have potential as future use for timber and may be suitable for high value cabinetry, furniture and perhaps flooring. The timber is described as straw to creamy brown with reddish hues.

On farmland, native stands of swamp sheoak have often been left unmanaged and mostly used by landowners for stock shelter, shade or conservation purposes (Photo 1). There is usually little or no understory or pasture in these stands due to the high tree stocking and lack of light. Thinning can also provide useful fodder (Table 1) from fallen foliage or coppiced stumps and the increase in light promotes pasture growth or native shrubs if farmers are grazing (Photo 2).

Landowners have an opportunity to manage these native stands providing they meet legislative clearing protocols set out by the Dept of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and more so if they wish to sell the timber.

Swamp sheoak is also promoted as a useful tree crop option on salt affected farmland and as a key revegetation species on duplex sands to heavy wet clays. As a seedling it is heavily browsed by stock, kangaroos and rabbits, although it recolonises freely and is often seen as a dense stand of between ~7,000-30,000 trees per ha on farmland or reserves. It is also subject to periodic stem and tip damage by 28 parrots resulting in multi-stemmed trees.

In 2007, I set up a demonstration site on Mr Clinton Wise's property at Woodanilling to show how landowners are able to thin dense thickets of swamp sheoak.

17 years previously Clinton has used a grader to form up 4 metre wide "raised beds" and sow local swamp sheoak seed with his combine as part of his landcare strategy to convert highly saline non-productive area of farmland.

The soil type was a waterlogged and saline shallow loam over heavy clays. Soil salinity (ECe) across the site averaged 285

Continued on next page

Growing and managing Swamp sheoak for multi-purpose land-use

Table 1 (below). Fodder analysis comparisons of 17 y.o. C.obesa with adjacent dry paddock feed sources and regular feed types

Feed source	Metabolisable Energy (mj/kg DM)	Crude Protein (%)	Dry matter (%)	Digestible Dry Matter (%)
Cas.obesa (coppice foliage)1	9.1	15.7	34.2	65.2
Cas.obesa (old crown foliage)2	7.2	8.4	58	53.8
Wheat stubble [1]	5.0	2.4	94.5	41.1
Dry pasture [1]	5.5	3.6	91.7	44.4
Lupins	12-14	25-35	90	-
Pasture hay	6-10	4-25	90	-

[1] measured 148 days after thinning (March 2008)

[2] measured at time of thinning (November 2007)

Note. ME (Metabolisable Energy) is well below level required to maintain dry stock (sheep) ie, at least 9 mj/kg DM needed

mS/m (EM 38 vertical dipole mode) measured with an EM 38 electro-magnetometer.

When I visited the 17 year old site with local landcare officers Jill Richardson (Katanning) and Danielle Perrie (Wagin/ Woodanilling) we were surprised how much colonisation or regeneration had occurred from natural seed fall and from mature trees in the adjacent road reserve (Photo 1).

With Clinton's permission I thinned plots to 6 tree stocking rates ie, 100, 200, 400, 600, 800 trees/ha and a 2 row belt plus an un-thinned control to monitor growth response. Many trees that had bird nests were retained as crop trees in the tree selection process (Photo 3).

All thinned material was measured for firewood as this commodity was scarce in the Katanning region. Locals are often illegally taking firewood from DEC reserves so firewood would be most sought after product ie, easy marketing.

When thinning from 5,200 to 400 trees/ha, about 44m3/ha of firewood resulted. This equates to about $4,413/ha gross of dry firewood using a conservative figure of $100/dry tonne. From the total area of the demo site of 0.64ha a total volume of dry firewood cut was 151 m3/ha or a gross return of about $23,590/ha.

Swamp sheoak will coppice when thinned and sunlight encourages strong growth from the stump (Photo 2). The young coppice was analysed for palatability levels and it was found that coppice is suitable as stock feed without supplementary feed (Table 1).

Bob Hingston is a Farm Forestry Development Officer and is currently working in Science and Industry Development Group with DAFWA.

He has over 40 years experience in forest research and extension officer in farm forestry. For further enquiries: bob.hingston@agric.wa.gov.au or 0409 109 051.

3. Future crop tree retained with birds nest

Casuarina obesa field day

Bob Hingston from DAFWA gives the lowdown on best provenances and other trial results
Photo courtesy of Dwayne Durcan

By Susan Gribble, Avongro

A successful field day was held in Northam on 23rd February where the spotlight was on Casuarina obesa, commonly known as swamp sheoak, and its potential as a key tree crop for saline land recovery and potential commercial benefits.

Bob Hingston, Farm Forestry Development Officer for DAFWA, facilitated a visit to a site in Goomalling where he has been trialling provenances of Casuarina obesa and researching their growth rates and other qualities.

Over 20 people, including landholders and others from a range of organisations, attended the day and came away informed of the huge potential of Casuarina obesa, the pros and cons of the various provenances on varying soil types, the extensive work on Casuarina's that is going on internationally and the potential research and development areas open for exploration.

A key learning from the day was the high nutritional value of the coppice of the swamp sheoak. Plantations can be thinned and the regrowth, or coppice, is excellent grazing for sheep and cattle, providing a high protein supplement. One farmer who has grazed his sheep in his obesa plantation commented that the wool from those sheep was excellent, which he put down to a combination of the nutritious coppice and the shade value of the trees for the stock. The thinnings can then be used for firewood. There was also talk about its potential to drive revegetation on saline land, along with the potential of growing the species for carbon benefits. Depending on how it is milled, the timber of the sheoak can also make beautiful furniture as the grain patterns are outstanding.

Internationally Casuarina obesa is being researched extensively for its growth rates and tolerance to salinity, alkalinity and drought and both China and India have vast areas of plantations used for tsunami buffers and paper pulp production. There is also research going on into the benefits of Frankia, a growth stimulant that has huge potential for application here in the Avon Wheatbelt region.

Along with Bob Hingston, attendees of the day heard high quality talks from Peter White, Nature Conservation Officer with DEC and Georgie Chrimes, Project Manager in Sustainable Agriculture at Wheatbelt NRM. Peter spoke about DEC's Toolibin Lake Recovery Catchment Casuarina obesa demonstration trial and the many benefits of this tree that have been highlighted through this work and point to its huge potential as a commercial crop, including its favourable timber qualities and ability to grow relatively straight and its naturally occurring abundance, widespread distribution and ease of seed collection. Georgie spoke about the potential for integrating saltbush and Casuarina obesa plantings on areas of varying salinity, an area ripe for more trial and experiment to get the best outcomes.

Overall, attendees were highly pleased with the day and interest in a Casuarina obesa working group, made up of people interested in progressing the research, trial and adoption of this highly versatile and undervalued tree crop into farm forestry systems in the Avon Wheatbelt region, has been reignited. For more information contact Avongro Wheatbelt Tree Cropping on 9291 8249 or email mdurcan@iinet.net.au

This field day was organised by Wheatbelt Australian Forest Growers and Avongro Wheatbelt Tree Cropping and was made possible by funding from Wheatbelt NRM under the Australian Government Caring for our Country programme.

Sandalwood field day

The group loaded onto two buses to tour to a couple of local sandalwood plantations and check out spacings, the various host species being used, and some of the problems encountered on Wodjil soils and how sandalwood plantations can combat these.

By Susan Gribble, Avongro

Around 45 people, including 27 landholders, were treated to a day of valuable information and a chance to get up close and personal with some sandalwood and their native host plants in Bencubbin in early March. The Mount Marshall Sandalwood group organised the day and delicious home-made food provided the perfect sustenance as attendees listened, looked, asked questions and got well informed and inspired about the possibilities of sandalwood plantations. Topics covered included plantation establishment and management in the North East wheatbelt, how sandalwood farming can be more profitable and designing plantations for multiple benefits, i.e. sandalwood, biodiversity, grazing for stock and carbon sequestration.

Presenter Dr Geoff Woodall has done extensive research on sandalwood plantations, including growing his own, and emphasised the importance of.spending the time at the beginning to carefully choose and prepare your site, prepare the seed for planting, decide on the most appropriate host plants and ensure sandalwood and host plants are spaced at the correct distance when planting. Dr Woodall discussed his experiments with direct seeding and how using hot water treatment for varying amounts of time on the various acacia species ensures greater success when direct seeding and therefore less volume of seed needed in your operation.

A presentation that catalysed lots of questions was that of Dr Peter Ritson from the Forest Science and Industry Development arm of the Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA). Dr Ritson spoke about the Carbon Farming Initiative and how it can work with sandalwood and emphasised the need to develop methodologies for carbon sequestration in sandalwood systems and get these methodologies accepted at Federal Government level in order for sandalwood growers to make the most of the CFI.

Jon Brand, senior forester at DAFWA, spoke about growth rates of sandalwood and host acacia plants on wodjil soils and pointed out that their research has found that over-stocked plantations on wodjil soils will eventually collapse, which highlights the importance of thinning. They found relatively slow growth rates in certain hosting arrangements and pointed out the necessity of refining host and sandalwood layout for maximum growth rates.

One keen group who flew over from NSW for the field day said the trip was well worth it and the feedback from other attendees was also highly positive. Anyone wishing to learn more about sandalwood or find out about the information they missed can contact Bethan Lloyd at the Australian Sandalwood Network, exec@sandalwood.org.au 08 9574 5882 or Bob and Ros Huxley from the Mount Marshall Sandalwood Committee, bob_huxley@bigpond.com rosmacfarlane@gmail.com

This field day was made possible with funding from Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management via the Australian Government Caring for our Country initiative

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