



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

Number 71 May 2010

Volunteer groups working with local government

There are many community support groups for local government parks and reserves – not all of them called 'Friends' groups. Councils have varying approaches. The VEFN Committee and the Municipal Association of Victoria have agreed 'Guidelines to encourage community support and volunteer participation in municipal parks and reserves'. The Guidelines relate to independent and autonomous volunteer Friends Groups, but some Councils have groups created pursuant to Section 86 of the Local Government Act 1989. The section says: 'In addition to any advisory committees that a Council may establish, a Council may establish one or more special committees ...' If a Group is a committee of the Council it does not have the ultimate independence of a group established in accordance with the Guidelines but may otherwise operate in a similar manner.

Michelle Gooding explains, from her wide experience.

There are many ways to start a community group, and I am sure there is no hard and fast rule for making a group successful. I think the major determinant for success is having a clear purpose for the group.

There are several models that involve volunteers. Groups that evolve from the community are often composed of members with a similar passion for a piece of land or history, or they may have come together to fight against a threat. These groups – typical Friends groups – are usually composed of local volunteers and may or may not become incorporated. For many reasons, their relationship with a council varies, as does the level of support from council, but in general they are independent and autonomous as a group. Whether a group is covered by council insurance varies with municipalities. In some cases, if a group is working on council land,

under the direction of a council officer and each member is signed in as a council volunteer, then as individuals they are covered under council's volunteer policy.

Another model is a Committee of Management (COM). Those of which I have had experience have developed from a Friends group into a formalised arrangement involving the local stakeholders, particularly local governments, and employ staff to undertake a coordinating role. These groups are not considered to be council committees as they often span more than one municipality and consider council to be a stakeholder rather than the convener. COMs need to have their own policies and procedures and their own insurance. The benefit of this model is that more resources can be available to seek substantial funding, and in turn this can grow the organisation further again. These groups can be highly successful if managed diligently and all stakeholders are committed. My experience with these kinds of groups tells me that it is important to have a clear *shared* vision and strategic plan.

Groups created by local governments, such as Advisory Groups or Steering Committees, are required to act within the Local Government Act 1989. The Act outlines briefly how these groups are structured and run. So long as members of these committees act within these guidelines then they are covered by the Act and Council. These groups are established by councils to enhance or implement a project or strategy by involving community members with specialist local knowledge and community networks.

In my opinion, no matter what the kind of group, or where it has come from, the most important elements for success are: that there is a clear shared purpose; that there is an atmosphere of respect; and that there is recognition that not all groups are made to last – a group shouldn't be allowed to get stale, but structure can be changed as necessary. These groups can be the vehicle for empowering community and managing an environment which will be respected, well used, protected and enhanced, and which will be valued by future generations.



Michelle Gooding took to a kayak to get a better understanding of the parkland she manages along the Maribyrnong River, and now kayaking is one of her leisure activities. As Conservation Parks Ranger – Moonee Valley City Council (previously Park Ranger – Hobsons Bay City Council), Michelle has worked with many municipal groups.

From your Network Committee Convener



Maelor Himbury
(Friends of Maribyrnong
Valley) Network
Committee Convener
9374 1902 (h)

The focus of this edition of *FriendsNET* is municipal groups which probably make up the majority of Friends groups working on public land. The recognition, encouragement and support they receive from their respective councils varies greatly but their commitment to the task remains consistent.

A very successful group is the Friends of Buckley Falls led by Tony Woolford (see his report below). Tony has retired from the VEFN

Committee after many years as an active member and I take this opportunity to thank him for his considerable input and support.

This also provides an opportunity to renew our call for volunteers to work on the VEFN Committee. Meetings are now bimonthly so it is not an onerous commitment. Please contact me at maelor@melbpc.org.au if you would like more information.

Groups in action

Two municipal groups with long and successful track records

Friends of Buckley Falls has operated for 25 years in a complex management situation. Convener Tony Woolford explains the history of the reserve and its management.



Tony Woolford
Convener,
Friends of Buckley Falls
5243 8833

Buckley Falls Park is located on the banks and adjacent land of the Barwon and Moorabool rivers at Geelong. Prior to municipal amalgamations in 1994, management involved four local councils, Barwon Water, the Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DC&NR) and State planning authorities.

The Geelong Environment Council (GEC) commenced revegetation operations at Fyansford in 1985. Some years later a Committee of Management (COM) was convened by DC&NR with the writer representing the GEC and later as Convener of the Friends of Buckley Falls which was formed in 1989. Operating as a subcommittee of the GEC has the advantage of incorporation, experience and funding.

In 1987, the GEC appointed botanist Geoff Carr to survey and prepare a plant list of the remnant vegetation and guidelines for the removal of weeds and revegetation. DC&NR prepared the first Management Plan in 1991. The City of Greater Geelong (COGG) appointed Thompson Berrill Landscape to update and prepare the second Management Plan in 2005.

In the initial stages we obtained funding from the City of South Barwon, Alcoa of Australia, DC&NR, and Parks Victoria. With the amalgamation of the councils, management of the park was transferred to the City of Greater Geelong, and the Committee of Management was later enlarged to include the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CCMA), Department of Sustainability & Environment and two community representatives.

During the 25 years, we have followed the pattern of the Organ Pipes NP with the writer being engaged in negotiating with the land-owners and developers to enlarge the park with two properties in Fyansford and three in Highton; this has doubled the size to 80 ha and

it is still expanding. As the park grew we took over the mowing and brushcutting of the newly planted and landscaped areas and weed control. The COGG were very cooperative and supplied funds for equipment and currently for the employment of a bush crew for two days of the week. Our work proposals and budget are submitted to the Environment Unit of the COGG and the COM for approval.

Our work in removal of large infestations of boxthorn, broom, hawthorn, peppercorn, willows, elms and ash trees etc. has been funded by the land-owners/developers, the COGG and the CCMA; we have kept up our joint planting/funding relationship with Alcoa and are free to obtain external funding for work and development in the park. This has enabled us to build three lookouts, information display boards, fencing and walking tracks with funds from federal, state and local government sources. We hold working bees every two weeks with occasional work on weekdays, and are supported by an excellent committee which includes four of the original members.

The convener is responsible for planning, liaison, health and safety, insurance, reporting, employment and supervision of groups such as the Conservation Volunteers Australia, and cooperation/compliance with local government requirements and regulations. As long as we deliver the goods we hope that we will be able to continue to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Kananook Creek Association – celebrating 40 years of action

The Kananook Creek is managed by the City of Frankston and Melbourne Water. The fortieth Anniversary of the Kananook Creek Association was celebrated on 28 February in conjunction with the opening of the Kananook Creek Boulevard at Frankston by the Minister for Planning Justin Madden. The Association was founded in February 1970 by a number of local residents concerned about the creek's

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appalling condition as an effluent drain and the spoiling of local beaches. It is a community group with 300 members, mostly living near the creek. It works to influence quality outcomes for the creek by practical hands-on restoration, by education and promotion. The Association's aim is 'to clean, restore and preserve the Kananook Creek and its environment'. It has worked tirelessly in conjunction with the Council and Melbourne Water on a systematic restoration program for the 43 ha reserve running parallel with the Nepean Highway from Seaford to the creek outlet at Frankston. It has propagated and planted over 90,000 plants. Propagation is carried out in the Council Nursery by KCA volunteers under a scheme set up by the Council.

Olwen Bawden (Secretary) 9789 0598



Revegetating the banks of Kananook Creek, Seaford

Experience Exchange (your space)

Mardi Townsend's article 'New tricks for old dogs' in the February *FriendsNET* has stimulated these responses.

I read Mardi Townsend's article 'New tricks for old dogs ...' in *FriendsNET* Number 70 with great interest. Although I was disappointed to see the concept of 'new tricks for old dogs' repeated four more times in the course of the article, I have no argument with the assertion that being a Friend of the environment can have health benefits for older people.

Dr Townsend might be surprised that 60-year-olds are usually well below the average age of Friends groups. Often the work is arduous, undertaken in hot, or cold, wet and windy conditions, without shelter or respite even at break times. Yet there are many dedicated Friends, who can proudly see the difference their work has made and treasure the friendships they have made in the course of their work.

If only recruiting new volunteers was simply a matter of asking! In retirement, people rightly expect to lessen the stress and responsibilities that they have endured in their working life and enjoy themselves. They still have many demands on their time and resources too – for example maintenance of their financial affairs and homes and often elderly parents and grandchildren who need their care and attention.

There are many leisure pursuits, which offer far more relaxation and respite than joining a Friends group. There are sporting activities, other less arduous but altruistic groups, e.g. Lions, Rotary etc., opportunities to learn new skills and hobbies, U3A groups, and just having enjoyment with groups like Probus.

There simply isn't a bank of physically able and interested folks, who only have to be asked to join us. A lot more thought and planning has to be put into attracting and keeping volunteers.

As we discussed at length at the recent biennial Friends Conference at Grantville, we need to

attract more people to join the wonderful Friends groups throughout Victoria, particularly young people. Too often the responsibility for Friends groups falls on the shoulders of people who have been involved for many years, have had their turn and would love to see younger volunteers take their turn.

The best recruits are friends of existing volunteers, so that they will know what to expect and will have someone to look after them until they feel comfortable within the group. The best Friends groups are those whose activities are well planned, with jobs suitable for all comers, who make an extra effort to make the activity fun, with hopefully some hot and cold drinks etc. Newsletters, working with rangers and conservation officers are aspects which are always appreciated by members, and keeping in touch with volunteers encourages them to feel part of the group and appreciated. These are the types of strategies that groups need to develop to attract volunteers, young and old.

*Tricia Allen – Seawinds Nursery Volunteers
5982 0800*

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The most recent cover of *FriendsNET* (February 2010) gave an outline of the value of environmental volunteering for older people. Contact with nature has a positive impact in that it assists to improve mood and mental health, alleviates stress, promotes good mental health, and maintains functionality and improved cardiovascular health.

While this article refers to these values in the context of older people, surely they can apply to everyone! Why not point this out to some friends (not only the older ones, but younger ones too), so encouraging them to be Friends.

Peter Bryant – Friends of Tarra-Bulga National Park 0447 474 573

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

How to contact us ...

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Group Grapevine

The **Friends of the Brisbane Ranges** have a grant from the Australian Geographic Society for the development of flora and fauna data recording programs using PDAs, GPSs and CyberTracker software. Their website has a link to their very colourful and detailed 2009 Annual Report.

Friends of Chiltern – Mt Pilot National Park have a delightful DVD entitled 'A Twitcher's Guide to Birding in the North-east'. There is no commentary – just the bird calls. All birds are named with common and scientific name. For a copy forward \$17.30 to Friends of Chiltern NP, PO Box 60, Chiltern 3683. The group is also excited about the release of 44 captive-bred Regent Honeyeaters in their park and are assisting with monitoring.

Friends of Wyperfeld invite other Friends to their 34th Queens Birthday weekend camp in the park – contact Karen Fuller 0438 612 618.

Friends of Churchill Island Society have a new comprehensive and very impressive website created on an honorary basis by Tom O'Dea, a retired IT professional.

Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests continue their program of monthly walks. The June walk is from Castlemaine to the Garfield Wheel and the Welsh Village. Contact Deirdre Slattery 5470 5161

Friends of Warrandyte State Park have made and installed clay blocks in their nursery to encourage the breeding of native Blue Banded Bees which pollinate nursery plants.

Friends of Waurin Ponds Creek have collected seeds from 15 plant types and propagated 8000 plants, 2000 of which have so far been planted.

Congratulations to **Friends of Dandenong Ranges National Park** (initially Friends of Ferntree Gully National Park) and to **Friends of Hattah-Kulkyne National Park** on receiving Parks Victoria 25 years Service Awards.

Friends of the Prom have assisted the Surfriider Foundation in sorting, counting beachcombing debris and logging it for the 'National Marine Debris Initiative'.

Angair have recently produced a new edition of 'Orchids of the Anglesea District'. See details in the next column.

If your group has not appeared in FriendsNET it may be because we do not receive your newsletter. Please ensure we are on your distribution list.

Orchids of the Anglesea District (3rd edition) by Everett Foster & Margaret MacDonald (2009)

The guide has a complete new look, with a panoramic view from the Anglesea coastal heathlands to the Split Point Lighthouse at Aireys Inlet on the cover. Three new orchids for the area have been included *Pterostylis chlorogramma* Green-striped Greenhood, *Chiloglottis trilabra* Tall Bird Orchid and *Lyperanthus suaveolens* Brown Beaks. Many digital images have replaced some of the images in the previous edition.

This is a companion book to *Flowers of Anglesea and Aireys Inlet* (2009). Price: \$30 (\$5.00 postage & handling)

Orders to: ANGAIR Inc., PO Box 12, Anglesea VIC. 3231
Cheques payable to ANGAIR Inc. \$28.00 (\$25 + \$3 postage)

VEAC Investigations

The Victorian Environment Assessment Council is currently conducting two investigations. Discussion Papers will soon be released and Friends Groups will have the opportunity to make submissions. The enquiries are:

Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation:

'to identify and assess the uses, resources and conditions, values and management of Crown land and public authority land'

Remnant Native Vegetation Investigation:

'to identify the condition, values, resources and uses of public land outside Victoria's largely intact landscapes.'

More on the VEAC web site: www.veac.vic.gov.au

2010 Landcare Awards

Nominations for the 2010 Port Phillip & Westernport Landcare Awards close on 18 June. One of the ten categories is 'Community Group Caring for Public Land'. See www.ppwcm.vic.gov.au/our-community/landcare-awards.aspx or contact Doug Evans 9296 4662.

Parks Victoria Grants

Applications close on 25 June for Parks Victoria 2010 Healthy Parks Healthy People Grants for Parks Victoria Community Groups under five categories: Environment, Recreation, Heritage, Community awareness & Multicultural access. Full details on www.parkweb.vic.gov.au or phone 13 1963.

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If undelivered, return to:
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