



INTO THE GOULBURN WETLANDS CASE STUDY

Overview

The Goulburn Wetlands is a 13.5 hectare council-owned site on the Mulwaree floodplain which is home to a diversity of bird and plant life. Plans to restore the historic former brick-works site were originally proposed by a local community group, the Goulburn Group. Their proposal gave rise to a local landcare group dedicated to the wetlands project (Friends and Residents of the Goulburn Swamplands Landcare Inc, also known as FROGS). In 201, Goulburn Mulwaree Council voted unanimously to adopt the plan to revitalise the wetlands and “to create

an attractive, safe and accessible community focal point promoting environmental awareness; and to improve the stability, biodiversity and water quality of the site”.

Initial works to clean up the site and establish basic infrastructure were conducted, and a second phase of works with the specific aim of allowing carers, older people and those with disabilities to directly experience nature and understand the unique heritage of the wetlands was investigated.





Inclusive and accessible features

This phase of the project included:

- Construction of three accessible carparking spaces
- Low gradient 85m path (with widened areas for wildlife observation, resting and adequate wheelchair turn radius)
- Viewing platform (providing a unique vantage point to observe the rich variety of bird species and plant communities)
- Wi-Fi communication system to enable visitor information to be accessible to people with vision and hearing impairment
- Wheelchair accessible picnic area and benches.

Goulburn Mulwaree Council and volunteer, retired council engineer, Peter Mowle, worked closely with FROGS to develop the project and consult extensively with groups representing the targeted user groups including Masonic Village, Long Street Retirement Village, The Disability Trust – Goulburn, Crescent School, Valmar Disability Support Services, McDermott Day Care Centre and Leisure Link. This ensured the project was planned to meet interest and accessibility requirements.

Key learnings

Like all projects involving the natural environment, one of the key challenges of Into the Goulburn Wetlands was to adequately quantify and structure the project to fit within the implementation frameworks of Goulburn Mulwaree Council and the grant funding program.

Seasonal conditions made it challenging to deliver within the agreed project timetable and a number of onsite factors caused unexpected delays. One such factor was an infestation of Chilean needle grass which proved much more difficult to eradicate than anticipated, necessitating research and liaison with the CSIRO. The issue still requires ongoing liaison and management with the CSIRO and is a great example of how unforeseeable factors can dramatically impact on the project timetable and risk factors.

The participation of FROGS, in the grant application and project, was invaluable. The project would not have been possible without the thousands of hours of work by this group of dedicated volunteers. Leveraging the passion of local community groups and incorporating valuable volunteer resources into the project structure is a great way of engaging the community and achieving outcomes that would not otherwise be possible.

Outcomes

Facilitating access to the Goulburn Wetlands has created the opportunity for many groups to visit, experience the site's distinctive flora and fauna and participate in wetland education. The walkway makes the entire wetlands site accessible, allowing anyone requiring wheelchair access an easy, flat path, around the site including to the bird viewing areas and new accessible platforms.

The FROGS team meets weekly onsite for further development and maintenance work and a cuppa. The ongoing contribution to the project's success, from 30 November 2015 to 30 June 2016 represents a total of 1585 'on ground volunteer hours', which does not include time on planning meetings and preparation for weekly activities.

The wetlands have become a popular excursion destination for local children with nearly every school in Goulburn visiting the site for environmental studies during 2015/16. A number of other local and visiting community groups also visited and enjoyed the site, including the Goulburn-Mulwaree U3A (University of the Third Age) to conduct environmental classes.

Goulburn Wetlands is an increasingly popular daily walking area for members of the community. The Wetlands is also used for a number of council/Roads and Maritime Services run social bike rides and Goulburn's annual fun run. Many favourable comments have been received as to the success of this project.



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