

ARMIDALE TREE GROUP NEWSLETTER

Number 128 – Autumn 2023



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Farewell Alicia and Thank You

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the Autumn Edition of the ATG Newsletter. Based on participation in that quintessential Armidale experience 'The Autumn Festival and Parade' if you ask people in Armidale, which is their favourite season I think autumn may be the most common reply. The Tree Group joined the festivities in Curtis Park and our native trees were welcomed amid the multi-coloured deciduous fanfare and the looming presence of the Giant Koala. Many trees were sold and new members recruited. Thank you to our volunteers on the day!

No event this autumn has been as significant to the Tree Group as saying farewell to Alicia Cooper as our General Manager. Alicia joined the Tree Group in 2013 as a field member of the Environmental Services team, which was managed at the time by Dan Davies. In October 2016 she became General Manager. From the beginning to the end of our third decade the Tree Group has grown and benefited from her dedication and skills in good times and bad including droughts and flooding rains.

Some of her favourite memories are of peaceful times working with the team in the potting shed, community planting days and working on successful grants.

You have been a formidable presence! While we farewell you as General Manager, we welcome the opportunity to continue working with you in your new role as environmental consultant. **Thank You Alicia! This Edition is dedicated to you.**



Figure 1 & 2 Enmore community planting - Every Tree Counts -

IN THIS EDITION

- **From the Committee** – The Annual Fundraising Appeal
- **Nursery News** – we farewell Alicia and welcome a new management team
- **Feature Article** – National Capital Accounting (NCA) Project – Susan Newey – Susan has witnessed the positive impacts of practicing regenerative grazing management on her property ‘Olmo’ for over 15 years. The NCA project will measure and quantify those changes.
- **40th Anniversary Celebrations -Update**

FROM THE COMMITTEE

Armidale Tree Group Annual Appeal

Forty years ago, a group of Armidale people established Armidale Tree Group to do something about Eucalypt dieback, which had killed millions of trees on the Northern Tablelands of NSW. Since that time, we have grown and planted millions of trees across the region – you’ve probably seen our work!

The need for trees hasn’t gone away though. Our wildlife, including koalas, desperately needs more habitat; farms need the shade, shelter and soil protection provided by bushland and what better way to extract some of the excess CO₂ in the atmosphere? Along with the closure of a number of farm tree nurseries in the region, the demand for trees has never been greater.

ATG is rising to meet this challenge. Forty years ago, our members grew trees in their backyards and held working bees to plant them on farms. Now we have a production nursery and a professional planting team based at the Mike O’Keeffe Woodland Centre. Our plan is to expand the capacity of the nursery and build up the capacity of our team to meet the rising demand for trees, tree planting and bushland management services. Over the next few months, we will double the nursery capacity by building new growing areas and installing better irrigation. But we need your help to do it.

As well as offering commercial tree planting services, we continue to work on community projects through our *Every Tree Counts* program. We are currently supporting a 40ha koala plantation near Mt Duval, restoring a box-gum grassy woodland at Acacia Park on the edge of Armidale and maintaining the Mike O’Keeffe Woodland next to the nursery. We hope to continue to expand these projects to other areas in the coming years. Right now, our team is managing weeds and preparing the ground for a major tree planting at Acacia Park and we will be installing nest boxes in some of the trees over winter.

ATG is unique in Australia as a long-lived community organisation, dedicated to rural conservation, which does not receive core funding from government. While this makes us independent, it also makes us vulnerable to the ups and downs of our variable climate. The last few years have been tough, with drought, fires, wet paddocks and cool summers making it hard to grow and plant trees. We have invested in our infrastructure and in the skills of our team and will hit the ground running in Spring.

Can you help us out, by making a tax-deductible donation to the ***Every Tree Counts*** fund. Your donation will go immediately into projects that improve the environment or build our capacity to do so:

- New greenhouses, irrigation and nursery benches to allow us to grow an extra 100,000 trees per year,
- Preparation, weed control and planting at Acacia Park woodland,
- Providing trees for the 40ha koala forest, or
- Supporting one of our other community projects in Black Gully, the Mike O’Keeffe Woodland or Dumaresq Creek.

If you can, we would love you to join our ***40 x 1000 Club***. To celebrate our 40th year, we are looking for 40 donations of \$1000. We would also be very happy to receive donations of less (or more) than this as well. We will honour donors to our ***40 x 1000 Club*** by adding your name to our honour board in the Woodland Centre. You can donate directly through our website using the following link or contact our manager, Jodie Gream, on 02 6771 1620.

Join us, as we move into the next 40 years of growing *Sustainable Landscapes*.

<http://armidaletreegroup.org.au/every-tree-counts/>



NURSERY NEWS

The big news from the Nursery is the new management team. Jodie Gream is replacing Alicia as the new General Manager.



Figure 3 Jodie Gream – the New General Manager (GM) with retiring GM Alicia Cooper staff, Committee members and volunteers At Alicia's farewell.

New management team

Jodie will lead a new management team to take on the inevitable challenges of ATG's fourth decade. Angela Symonds is in the position of Nursery Coordinator, Sue Jaeger is the new Environmental Services (ES) co-ordinator and Marty Belcher will continue his outstanding efforts as ES Field Officer. All team members have hit the ground running. The Committee have confidence in the team's abilities and Jodie's leadership and thank them for their commitment and efforts during this major transition.

The Natural Capital Accounting Project

Susan Newey

Last year, the Newey farm Olmo along with Stuart Hutton’s property Fern Hill were fortunate enough to be selected along with 4 other farms on the Northern Tablelands to be included in the Farm-scale Natural Capital Accounting Project.

The Natural Capital Accounting Project is jointly funded through La Trobe University, the Odonata Foundation and the Australian Government’s Smart Farming Partnership Program. The project commenced in 2020 and aims to be completed by mid-2023.

This project, encompassing 50 farms across Tasmania, Victoria and NSW aims to “map” the farms’ **natural capital** (all elements of the natural landscape) including the soil and its biome (microbes, fungi, invertebrates) water quality, insects, vegetation (including grasses, forbs, sedges, crops, understorey species e.g. acacias & trees), birds and mammals. The farms selected for the first round of this project have generally been selected because they are being run along more “regenerative” rather than “industrial” guidelines.

“Natural capital accounting is a tool that enables farmers to record and manage the natural capital on their farms, both in physical and monetary terms. Like financial accounting, natural capital accounts are guided by an agreed set of standards, and are quantifiable, verifiable and repeatable”.

The project involves scientists (including entomologists, ornithologists, ecologists, and botanists) setting up numerous sites on each farm and conducting rigorous

Figure 4 Narelle Clarke volunteer field assistant – at ‘Olmo’ during NCA project



identification and quantifying of all species within their speciality, on those sites.

I have been a keen observer of

the positive changes that have occurred on Olmo since I introduced regenerative grazing management here more than 15 year ago. These changes manifest as both environmental and production enhancements, and include greater species and

numbers of birds, greater numbers of insects, almost complete disappearance of bare ground and erosion, improved soil structure and composition, more mammals such as the gorgeous Swamp Wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*), appearance of rarer native grass species e.g. Silky Brown Top (*Eulalia aurea*), an increased stocking rate and almost complete disappearance of sheep “camps” and many weeds including thistles and barley grass,

The NCA Project will be able to quantify these observations and other parameters scientifically.

To quote Rachel Lawrence, the ecologist on the project “There are so many farmers out there who manage complex ecosystems in extraordinary ways and are not recognised for it. It is important to me to help in developing methods that can make that recognition possible. Doing this will also help the considerable challenge of protecting landscapes and agriculture against the dual and interconnected threats of climate change and biodiversity loss.”

Over 58% of Australia’s landmass is managed under agriculture. It makes sense in this time of increasingly erratic climatic conditions, that farmers are given the tools and knowledge to see a way forward to manage their land within a regenerative framework, to affect carbon drawdown and ameliorate global warming.

Susan Newey

40th Anniversary Celebrations Update

Alicia’s parting gift to the Tree Group was to secure a grant to install a footbridge in the Michael O’Keefe Woodlands. The bridge will commemorate our forty years of commitment to the environment and to the community of Armidale. We plan to have the bridge officially opened in October to coincide with other events to celebrate the 40th Anniversary. Check our facebook, website and instagram for dates and updates.

<http://armidaletreegroup.org.au/every-tree-counts/>



Figure 6 Volunteers planting at the Michael O’Keefe Woodlands

State Government grant to purchase and install a timber truss footbridge to span Black Gully Creek

A WALK around the Black Gully Reserve and Mike O'Keefe Woodland is about to become a lot safer and more enjoyable thanks to a \$32,970 State Government grant to purchase and install a timber truss footbridge to span Black Gully Creek.

MP Adam Marshall said the Armidale Tree Group was motivated to apply for the grant as members had identified a safety risk for visitors to the woodland and were hoping to create a safer, more enjoyable loop walk.

"To walk through the woodlands and access both sides of the wetland, walkers need to cross a hazardous section of Kentucky Street," Mr Marshall said.

"With the installation of the footbridge and establishment of a loop path, this street crossing can be avoided and will allow for improved visitor enjoyment and access to the reserve.

"The planned riparian restoration surrounding the footbridge will also improve the habitat value for native birdlife, while improving the aesthetics of the reserve.

"It's a great project and I'm hoping that people who enjoy visiting the Mike O'Keefe Woodland will soon be enjoying the ease and safety afforded by the new bridge.



Figure 5 MP Adam Marshall with Armidale Tree Group General Manager Alicia Cooper enjoying the Mike O'Keefe Woodland, where a \$32,970 grant has been secured to install a footbridge over Black Gully Creek.

Well done to Alicia and her team on securing the funds."

Armidale Tree Group General Manager Alicia Cooper said they intended to have the project fully delivered by the middle of this year.

"While the footbridge will need to be purchased further afield, we will be using local contractors for the associated earthworks and we will be providing native plants to revegetate and rehabilitate the creek banks after construction," Ms Cooper said.

"We were very happy to hear that our application was successful and we're looking forward to being able to increase visitor accessibility to this wonderful piece of remnant urban woodland.

"The mature native plantings and constructed wetland provide a wonderful environment for outdoor classes, workshops and guided tours, all of which will be improved with the addition of a timber footbridge to allow visitors to safely cross the creek."

Thanks Alicia ... we look forward to working with you in your new endeavours





Membership Application/Renewal

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

***Email (Required):** _____

Payment method: cash / cheque / credit card / direct credit

Please indicate your membership preference, you will receive an email when membership is due:

- \$5.00 for 1 year
- \$10 for 2 years
- \$25 for 5 years
- \$50 for 10 years

Donation \$ _____

Please find enclosed my/our cheque* for \$ _____

* Make cheques payable to Armidale Tree Group Inc.

or

Please debit my credit card for \$ _____

Card type: Visa / Mastercard only

Card number: _____

Expiry date: _____

CCV number: _____

Name on card _____

Signature: _____

To pay by Direct Credit Please remit payment to

BSB: 932000 Account No...620682 (please tag payment as 'subs')

accounts@armidaletreegroup.org.au

Donations over \$2.00 are tax deductible to The Armidale Tree Group Fund

Date processed: _____

Office use only
