



The Force of Mother Nature

Recent months have seen flooding of all levels, storms, fires and cyclones, some locally but also nationally. Whilst our thoughts and prayers go out to those severely effected, there have been significant damage and impacts on a local scale.

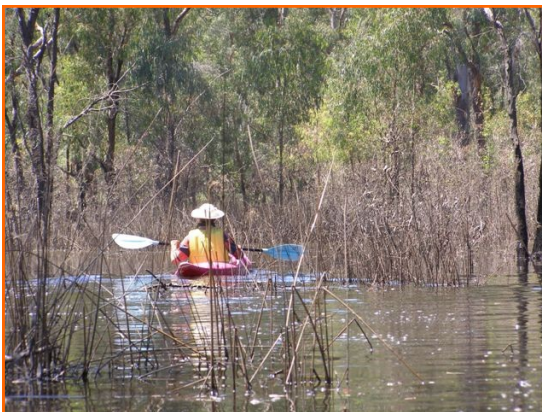
Shepparton and Mooroopna has seen 4 significant flood events since September 2010. These events have varied in scale, but each one has left both positive and negative impacts on our riverine environments.

Those who are regular users of the extensive shared path network will have noticed the dramatic increase in old River Red Gums falls, not only across these paths but throughout the floodplain between Shepparton and Mooroopna. This increase is due to the large volume of water our soils have been absorbing and therefore the large trees became too heavy for their root systems to support in these saturated soils. Tree falls are a naturally occurring event, however with so few old trees remaining, there is concern about the decline in their numbers and the natural hollows they provide.



Photo Above: The foreground shows bank stabilisation techniques along the Broken River.

Some may have also noticed severe bank slumping occurring along the Goulburn River. This is when large sections of the bank fall into the water. As the Goulburn is an active river, each year bank slumping occurs naturally, however due to the large volumes of water of late, this slumping has increased dramatically, and in some cases, is nearing areas where the general public frequent. The Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority have bank stabilisation projects to assist with excessive bank slumping.



Above : Gemmills Swamp—January 2011

Increased volumes of water have filled Gemmills Swamp for the first time since 2007. This has meant the rejuvenation of many flora species which has lead to an increase in fauna and especially bird species. Gemmills Swamp, unlike Reedy Swamp, does not receive environmental water, and therefore relies upon natural flood events to fill its reserves.

RiverConnect Strategic Plan Update

In formulating the RiverConnect Strategic Plan, the RiverConnect Community Advisory Committee (CAC) has carefully considered the needs of the community based on previous studies, consultation undertaken by the CAC, together with its knowledge of a range of community issues. This has also been supplemented by a range of reports providing technical background on many of the issues considered in the planning process.

This is a strategic plan that establishes a vision for the future, and identifies a range of actions that could be undertaken to achieve this vision. It is not a "blueprint" with every future action fully detailed. Many of the actions will require further investigation to determine their detailed design and feasibility, and the implementation process will include structured, prioritised investigations to develop the necessary detail as funds become available for implementation.

RiverConnect undertook extensive community and partner Strategic Plan consultation. Phase 1 of the consultation, during November and December 2009, saw over 60 responses received from individuals and organisations. Phase 2 of consultation saw a lower number of direct respondents, however, it also provided more detail and guidance given to the action programs.

Some common trends that emerged from the consultation included:

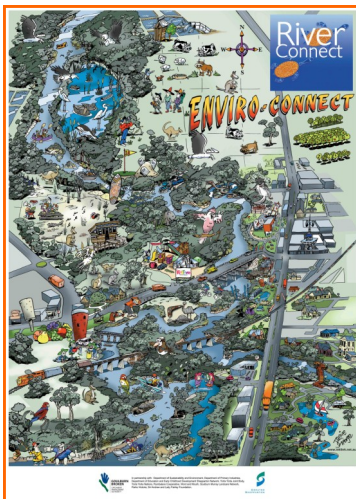
- To increase river access
- To develop 'loop' circuits on the existing shared path network
- To increase signage including interpretative signage.
- To continue to develop the Adopt-a-Reach program and develop new educational programs
- To promote both European and Aboriginal History

All feedback and comments received were presented to the RiverConnect Community Advisory Committee, who endorsed a final document on 16 February 2011. The final stages for the RiverConnect strategic plan are to gain final endorsement from Parks Victoria, Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority, Yorta Yorta Nations and the Greater Shepparton City Council.

Once endorsed, the plan will remain a living document with continual community and stakeholder consultation and annual review under the guidance of the newly formed RiverConnect Implementation Advisory Committee.

'What's Out There?' Kits

RiverConnect has developed a 'What's Out There?' curriculum resource to support the school's Adopt-a-reach project.



These kits include both hard copy and digital versions of :

- A0 and A4 size poster of the 'What's Out There?' art work either in Mel Ways grid format or in six figure grid format.
- The teachers manual which includes ideas and activities that are suitable across a variety of the various Domains from prep level to year 10.

Each RiverConnect School received a complimentary copy of this Kit, however more kits are available for purchase.

For further information or to order a Kit, please contact RiverConnect Education Coordinator, Dianne Hanna at dhanna@mcmmedia.com.au.

For more information please contact:

Bonny Blay, RiverConnect Project Officer, Greater Shepparton City Council,
Direct Ph. 03 58329714 Email: bonny.blay@shepparton.vic.gov.au

New Equipment for RiverConnect

RiverConnect has recently purchased a range of new equipment. These purchases have been made possible through the recent success at the Regional Achievement and Community Awards and the successful grant application to the Shepparton Irrigation Region Catchment Education and Awareness Grants 2009/2010. This award and grant money was used to purchase 2 spotlights, 6 sets of binoculars, 6 GPS units, logos for the RiverConnect trailer and water cart and various other equipment.

The spotlights will obviously be utilised when guiding the regular RiverConnect Spotlight Night Walks, while the GPS units will be used predominately by RiverConnect VCAL students undertaking weed mapping exercises for Parks Victoria, Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority and Greater Shepparton City Council. The binoculars will be a great asset for students and community to utilise when undertaking various RiverConnect activities.

Community groups and partner organisations are encouraged to utilise this new equipment. For further information, please contact RiverConnect Field Officer, Wendy D'Amore at wendy.damore@shepparton.vic.gov.au.



Above: RiverConnect Trailer with new logos.

Parks Victoria River Red Gum Thinning Program

Parks Victoria have developed a River Red Gum Thinning Program for the floodplain environment between Shepparton and Mooroopna, now established as the Shepparton Regional Park. This program has been developed in response to mandated requirements and environmental damage due to recent storm and flood events.



Above: Goulburn River in flood, December 2010

The program permits the removal of domestic firewood from the area north of the Midland Highway Causeway known as Youngs Bend. Community members will still require the appropriate permits to undertake domestic firewood removal and current restrictions and conditions will still apply. Domestic Firewood removal will only be permitted during Autumn and Winter 2011.

As part of this program, Parks Victoria staff will soon commence the felling of damaged trees along the north and south side of the causeway. Smaller green trees with no or low diversity values will be targeted, therefore increasing overall forest health. For further information, please contact Parks Victoria on (03)5820 1100.

Good bye Renee

It is with mixed feelings that we say goodbye to Renee as she takes maternity leave as from 4th March. We wish her and Tank well in this next stage of their life as parents, and know they have many wonderful times ahead. The RiverConnect team thank Renee for her passion and the wonderful leadership she has given to RiverConnect, for the many successful projects she has initiated and overseen, and for her most efficient and effective management of the RiverConnect Working Groups and the Community Advisory Committee. The future of RiverConnect is looking very exciting with a clear strategic direction in place and Renee has significantly contributed to this.

We are pleased to welcome Bonny Blay as our new RiverConnect Project Officer and we all look forward to working with her. Bonny comes from the Council IT department and has a background in conservation and land management.

Shepparton High School "Reach out to your river"

Shepparton High school year 8 science students studied the unit 'Reach out to your River ' during Term3. We travelled to the SHS "reach" on the Goulburn River at Cemetery Bend (Rudd Rd) on six consecutive Fridays, to investigate the river and the Riparian Zone.

Our first visit provided a general overview and a special look at a cross-section from the water's edge to 400m inland. We noted the type and range of vegetation and evidence of human activity with a highlight being a visit to the scar tree. The students noted and photographed native plants and weeds and considerable rubbish dumping.

Mr Royce Dickson from the Shepparton Mooroopna Landcare group accompanied the groups.

The second visit was specifically to observe and explain the fish ladder using documentation from GBCMA. Fish species, breeding and tagging were explained. John Pettigrew (environmentalist) accompanied us and spoke about flood levels and possible old courses of the river.

Our third visit had two themes- One group investigated the animal occupants with naturalist, John Laing, (from Goulburn Murray Landcare Network) who concentrated on the types of animals that inhabited the area in the trees, soil and hidden in the vegetation. The other group previewed water statistics with Danielle Beischer from G.V. Water Watch.

The fourth visit was with the Indigenous rangers Greta Morgan and Hilda Stewart who spoke about the Yorta Yorta people as Traditional custodians of the land.

The fifth and sixth visits were with GV Water educators Kristy Elrington and David Hodgkins who helped students assess the river water quality using chemical tests and assessing the type and frequency of macro invertebrates present.

Our final visit was to the Waste Water Treatment Plant in Daldy Road where Kristy again conducted an information session on why we treated the waste water, what it contained, how it was treated and where it was finally dispersed to.

Back at school, in their review period each week, the students documented their river visit in print and in picture and completed appropriate worksheets.

Student feedback was very positive and showed the value of such a program.....

"It was good. The activities were interesting and we got to see and know more about the wildlife and nature in connection to the river." Brooke

"It was enjoyable going down and looking at the river and meeting my aunty there as the indigenous ranger." Wilfred

The project was appreciated as something completely different and enjoyed by all students.



Above: Royce Dickson with students from Shepparton High School.

Pauline Pettigrew (SHS Science Teacher)