

High Country Weed Management

The Omeo and Benambra Landcare Groups have been employing Colin Sedgman as a community weed facilitator to assist land managers to undertake weed management in the high country for a number of years. This joint group project, funded by the North East CMA, through the Victorian Government's Second Generation Landcare Grants, has been working to involve a broad range of private and public land managers to manage weeds in the area.

The weeds facilitator, Col Sedgman, is employed by the groups to coordinate and assist private and public land manager activities for weed management in the Benambra, Omeo and Dinner Plain areas. These activities include information and education events, bulk chemical purchases for landholders, coordinated bio-control releases with Parks Victoria, and working with VicRoads, DSE, DPI, Goulburn Murray Water and local government to coordinate weed management efforts.

Col Sedgman organises bulk chemical purchases each year with neighbouring Landcare Groups, and these have been consistently achieving significant savings for landholders. Col said that in 2005 landholders saved over \$13,000 in chemical costs (15-60% saving depending upon the chemical). This is the only financial incentive landholders receive through this project, as the groups do not provide chemical rebates.

Parts of the Omeo & Benambra district, including Alpine National Park, suffer considerable infestations of English Broom in inaccessible forests. Much of this area was burnt in the 2003 Fires, adding to land manager's problems along with the continuing drought.

The 2003 fires created a number of problems and a few opportunities for land managers in the area. The burning of large areas of heavy English broom infestations on private and public land opened up access to some areas. Land managers have been making the most of this opportunity since the fires, spraying large areas of broom regeneration, with complementary works on crown and private land.

Due to the difficult terrain of much of the area, coordinated helicopter spraying is used by group members. Assistance for helicopter weed spraying of around 450 hectares in 2003 and 2004 came from DSE fire recovery funds, while landholders met the costs in 2006. This was a major investment by landholders of over \$70,000 in helicopter and chemical costs to manage weeds on inaccessible terrain.

The emergency stock fodder donated and brought in following the fires also brought potential new weed species for the area. Col has organised information brochures and identification sessions for landholders, to allow them to identify and control new species before they became established. This proactive approach led to a few new infestations being found and managed.

Col and group members have been working with Parks Victoria and KTRI staff to establish and maintain English Broom Nursery bio control sites, with additional releases

of the twig mining moth (*Leucoptera spartifoliella*) in the area. In late 2006, Col Sedgman and Cathy Allen from Parks travelled to NSW to collect large quantities of the moth larvae to accelerate the introduction of this bio control agent. Approximately 30,000 moths were released through this work. It is hoped that two new bio-control agents for English Broom will be released in the area as soon as they are available. Other bio-agents such as St Johns Wort mite have also been released in the area as part of this project.

As part of the education and awareness activities, Col has been facilitating regular education and information sessions such as weed information days with staff from Keith Turnbull Research Institute (KTRI), weed information stands at the Omeo Show, and sessions at the Alpine School.

This long term project is planned to continue with Second Generation Landcare Grants support. In the community, Colin has become the first point of contact for landholders on weed and land management issues, an important role with the limited agency support available. The concept of coordinated, community weed facilitator has been promoted to and taken up by other groups in the North East region, with further successes.