

Sugarloaf Link Project Update



Sugarloaf Link Project Progress - September 2019

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Project Progress

We are really excited to let you know that Council has finalised the appointments of Fox and Deer control contractors for the next 12 months of the Sugarloaf Link Project.

We are fortunate to have the expertise and knowledge of some real professionals to lead us in these program areas:

Fox Control

- Ken Keyes
Melbourne Wildlife and Pest Control. Phone 0438 728 400

Deer Control

- Richard Francis and Andrew Douglas
Abzeco. Phone Richard 0414 475 654
- Jacob Haddad and Geoffrey Van Steenis
Victorian Pest Animal Control (VPAC). Phone Jake 0417 106 903

Ken is a local from the Kinglake area, and has been involved in the trapping of foxes for over 26 years. He has worked within Nillumbik on both fox and deer control operations, mainly for private landholders.

Richard and Andrew both reside in Nillumbik and bring a wealth of local knowledge of properties throughout the Shire, with an emphasis on biodiversity protection through ecological research and surveying, pest plant and animal control works. Richard has a large crew of experienced personnel for

deer control works, with recent programs including regular deer control on private properties within and around the project area; and a targeted deer, goat and pig control program at the Puckapunyal Army Base.

Jake and Geoffrey have been heavily focussed on deer control recently, particularly for Parks Victoria in the Yellingbo area, protecting habitat for the Helmeted Honey-eater. They also have private deer control clients in Warrandyte and Wonga Park. They have had some brilliant successes with deer control in state reserves, where they have been known to cull an extraordinary number of deer within a short period.

Achievements

The Sugarloaf Project has had an overwhelmingly positive response, so thank you!

297 private properties were initially contacted by mail to invite participation. In total, 74 properties - nearly 25% - have signed up which is a great response. Of these 67 properties are interested in deer control, 65 in fox control, and 49 in weed control.

In the 2018-19 financial year, the Sugarloaf Link project completed 19.5 hectares of weed control in Parks Victoria estate at the Warrandyte-Kinglake Nature Conservation Reserve Ridge Block (Blackberry, Spanish Heath, Broom, Black Wattle and Pittosporums) and Ironbark Block (Gossamer Wattle and Radiata Pine).

Private land weed control was also undertaken, coordinated by the Bend of Islands Conservation Association (BICA) and implemented by Tserin Wright (Canopy Connection). 56.5 hectares of weed control was completed across 16 properties in the Bend of Islands. Weeds are in relatively low levels in this area, so control was focussed on weeds with the potential to spread, as well as striving to bring vegetation in the area to the ambitious target of 100% locally indigenous plants (excluding kitchen gardens).

A fantastic job all around. Special thanks to Deirdre and the BICA sub-committee, and the contractors for their hard work in such a short time frame.

Next Steps

We are currently arranging photographic ID badges for the new contractors, so that they are easily identifiable when they are out on site.

Works Plans will be developed in consultation with the Sugarloaf Project Officer for all program areas. These will be a calendar of activities for weed, fox and deer control, indicating the properties to be targeted, and works expected to be undertaken based on the results of site surveys.

When out on site, contractors will explain to property owners the works they recommend, based on what they can see from assessments, and all activities will be undertaken only with the owner's full support.

Weed Control

Weed control will re-commence shortly, and contractors (Tserin Wright, Canopy Connections and Wurundjeri's Narrap Team) will be contacting the landholders within the weed control program area to initiate works or arrange site inspections to determine the scope of works required.

Fox Control

Ken will begin calling landholders who have signed up for fox control works over the next couple of weeks. He will need to be fairly strategic about where he will focus works. This might mean that your property may not be utilised for trapping, but it will still reap the benefits.

Now is the time that foxes are in their dens breeding, so it is the perfect time for den fumigation! Please let Ken know if you are aware of any dens (or fox presence in general) on your property.

Timing of trapping is aligned to be of greatest benefit to our precious Phascogale babies as they leave their nests, but reduction of fox populations can occur at any time between now and March (approx.).

Ken will prepare a plan of what fox control actions he will undertake, as well as prepare a calendar for trapping, indicating which properties will be included in works. We will ensure that all landholders in the project area are made aware of when these activities are due to commence.

Deer Control

Abzeco is working collaboratively with VPAC to map out and document known and likely deer bedding and feeding areas, as well as determine tracks that the deer are using regularly. This planning is likely to include some property site visits, and could potentially include the placement of trail cameras to confirm presence at some locations.

* All site visits will be pre-arranged between the contractors and the Landholders.

Note – if you signed up for Monitoring as part of your Landholder Agreement, you may be contacted for site surveys or camera placement, even if you are not participating in deer control. Sightings of deer at your property won't mean that you will be required to have any deer control works undertaken – but it will benefit the project by adding to our information about deer movement and numbers.

The plan at this stage is to:

- Develop an Operational Plan detailing areas for deer control works, including likely methods in different locations or terrain areas
- Select 10 initial properties over the project area which are likely to have high deer density and ease of access for shooting and retrieval
- Undertake site surveys to determine access points, hazards, deer presence and safe control areas.
- Prepare a Shoot Plan for every property or group of properties where works are planned to occur. These plans will have to be approved by Victoria Police before works can commence.
- Notify landholders and neighbours of planned shoot periods
- Begin control program works
- Assess success of approach, refine if required, then extend the works.

Council is pleased with this approach to focus initial control in areas which should provide rapid results – more bang for our buck! These sites may not be high in biodiversity, for example they may comprise more open land. Instead control at such sites is expected to reduce deer numbers in the project area overall, and reduce their movement into the more valuable bushland areas. Contractors will roll out works across the project area over the next 12 months based on further information on deer movement patterns across the changing seasons.

Further Information

As the main contact for the program, if you have any questions about the program, please feel free to contact me. Email environment@nillumbik.vic.gov.au, or phone 03 9433 3543.

I feel very happy to be leaving you in the capable hands of our Sugarloaf Project contractor team. All are very friendly and approachable, and I am sure we will all learn a lot from them.

Kind regards

Michelle Hanslow