

Sugarloaf Link Project



Nillumbik Shire Council has received a 3 year Biodiversity Response Plan grant from the State Government to protect natural biodiversity values. This is being referred to as the Sugarloaf Link Project.

The project will enable community and government agencies to reduce the impact of weeds, fox and deer on private and public land in the south-eastern region of our Shire.

Aim of the project

The Sugarloaf Link project will protect natural habitats, native plant populations, agricultural enterprises and waterways from the degradation caused by deer and weeds.

Small native animals should also flourish by reducing fox numbers. Species such as Brush-tailed Phascogales, Slender-tailed Dunnarts and various threatened orchid species will benefit from these works.

Who is involved?

Nillumbik Shire Council is working in partnership with DELWP (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning), Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, Wurundjeri Council, Bend of Islands Conservation Association (BICA), Christmas Hills Landcare Group and local landholders.

Where is it happening?

The project will centre around Bend of Islands, Watsons Creek and Christmas Hills. This area forms a vital link in the major habitat corridor connecting Kinglake National Park to the Yarra River.

Information about deer

This project is Nillumbik's first collaborative program to control and reduce the impact of deer in the local area.

With numbers on the rise, deer are becoming a serious pest in Nillumbik. Impacts of deer include:

- Destroying native vegetation and reducing biodiversity through browsing and wallowing
- Reducing productivity of farms through crop damage, causing financial hardship for local agricultural producers
- Posing a serious hazard on roads, risking the lives of road users.

The project partners will use learnings to help inform potential future deer control programs across the Shire.

Professionally accredited deer hunters, experienced in working in peri-urban areas, will undertake humane shooting of feral deer, using thermal imaging cameras and other specialised equipment on private properties to the south and west of the Sugarloaf Reservoir to stem deer movement from Kinglake National Park southward into more residential areas.

These works complement works being undertaken by both Melbourne Water (within the fenced area of the Sugarloaf Reservoir) and over the river in Manningham Council, where deer control works are coordinated by the Jumping Creek Catchment Landcare group.

Following recent changes to legislation, there is now the ability to 'harvest' the meat for consumption and other uses. Initially this will most likely be for pet food and rendering for fertiliser. This provides a rebate back to Council (or the landowner, if undertaking their own works with an accredited harvester) which will fund Council's ability to extend the project further.

There may also be some opportunity for landowners to take some of the meat for their personal use.

Information about the red fox

Professional contractors will use soft-jaw trapping to control foxes on private property within the project area, at sites where there are a number of adjacent properties signed up to be involved.

Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water will also undertake works, particularly in reserves adjacent to the participating properties.

Trapping of foxes will be carried out in accordance with the requirements of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* and associated regulations, with traps checked every morning. This method reduces possible impacts to other animals.

Information about weeds

The Wurundjeri's Narrap team will be undertaking non-grassy weed control. Initially this will be in the Bend of Islands area. A combination of non-invasive techniques will be used including drill and fill/cut and paint and hand removal.

The approach will be to prioritise the protection of areas with the greatest biodiversity or agricultural values that are at the highest risk of damage, through prevention, eradication, asset protection and containment. This also involves managing nearby high threat weeds if they are likely to spread into high priority areas.

Assistance with monitoring

As part of this project we need to monitor weed infestations, deer and fox sightings. We would like to hear from landowners, even those who may not need to have any works undertaken, who may be able to provide 'control sites' for vegetation health assessments, photo-points, scat counts or deer surveys.

Ongoing participation

It is expected that interested landowners will agree to continue management works to prevent weeds from re-invading once the project is complete. This may be supported through Council incentives in some instances. Your local Landcare group may also be able to provide assistance.

Do you want to take part or find out more?

If you want to take part in any aspect of the Sugarloaf Link Project, contact Council's Project Officer Michelle Hanslow on 9433 3543 or email Michelle.Hanslow@nillumbik.vic.gov.au

You will need to provide your property address, email and phone number.

Council's project team is keen for all deer sightings to be recorded through the new Deer Scan app.

Visit feralscan.org.au/deerscan and download the app for iPhone or Android devices.

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