

Mount Breckin Project

Newsletter # 2

HUNTER LOCAL LAND SERVICES

August 2020

Hunter Local Land Services (HLLS) are working with landholders in the Mount Breckin area to reduce pests and weeds, address minor erosion issues and to generally improve and learn more about the biodiversity values that Mount Breckin holds.

The Mount Breckin Project is supported through funding provided through the NSW Environmental Trust and Hunter Local Land Services.

This is the second newsletter for this Project. These newsletters aim to keep local landholders and community members, with an interest in Mount Breckin, informed of project activities as they progress.

Project Background and Progress

The Mount Breckin Project was developed as a 3 year first stage pilot project and has now progressed into its second year. The possibility of the Project being extended beyond the pilot period will depend on how well the pilot achieves its objectives. The main objectives are;

- To have 20 landholders participating in the Project
- To undertake 240ha of initial and follow-up weed control targeting African Olive and Lantana
- To achieve up to 40 'hits' or kills of pest animal species present in the area
- To stabilise up to 3ha of soil erosion areas
- To hold training and workshop events for landholders and to include local school students in learning about the values and issues of the Mt Breckin area.

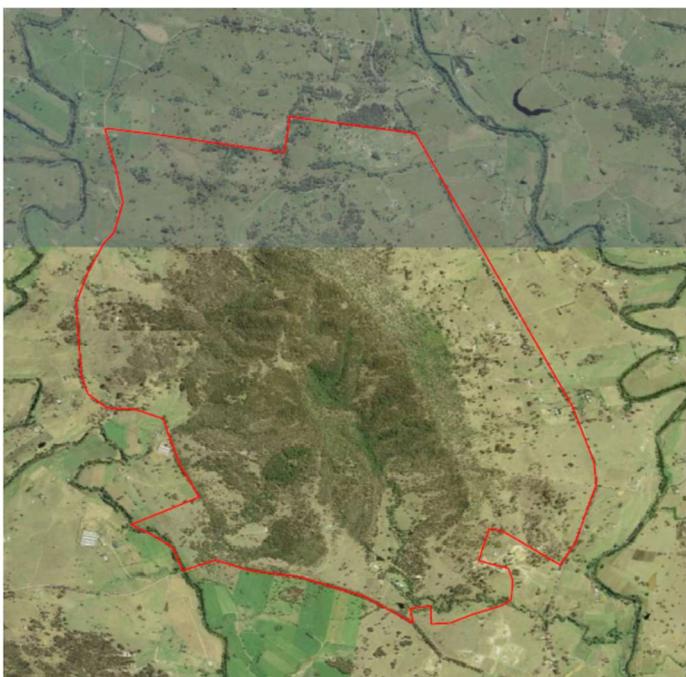


Figure 1: *The Mt Breckin Project Area*

So, how are we progressing so far? Rather well considering a difficult time for all with bushfires, drought and a global pandemic virus!

There are 15 landholders participating in the Project in some shape or form. This has resulted in over 80ha of assisted weed control.

We have had 7 confirmed 'hits' on the pest animal front.

Soil erosion areas are yet to be assisted - there have been a few identified.

There has been an initial workshop and a pest animal control training session held for landholders. A workshop to review pests and weeds planned for April was postponed due to Covid-19.

Weed Control Work

Weed control work has been continued throughout autumn/winter this year following some decent rains. Two local contractors – Rural and Environmental Management and Sky Land Management – have been engaged to treat African and Lantana across nine properties. These properties located along the north, north-west and eastern sides of Mt Breckin have collectively had over 80ha of weed control undertaken so far. There has also been some roadside treatment of African Olive completed by Dungog Council along Fishers Hill and Summerhill Roads.



Left: Dungog Council Weeds Officer treating African Olive along Fishers Hill Road
Centre and Right: Monitored African Olive health decline after initial treatment late last year (Photos: M. Padmos)

Blocks of weed control work are anticipated to continue as an on-going activity depending on weather and moisture conditions. There is a wider range of conditions that African Olive can be treated under compared to Lantana.

Pest Animal Control

Photo footage is continuing to be captured and regularly reviewed via motion detection cameras positioned along what were becoming known wild dog travel routes across the mountain. Five dogs, one fox and one rabbit have been caught via laid traps so far. The last check on camera footage earlier this month revealed very low dog activity meaning that traps haven't been re-laid to date, however when activity increases traps will be re-set or alternatively a small 1080 baiting programme may be considered. Weather conditions were not very favourable during the last few months with wet, slippery conditions preventing access.



Left: Hunter LLS Biosecurity Officer Kyra O'Brien and contractor Helen Leake downloading camera footage.
Centre and Right: Wild dog footage at the same camera location in January and March this year reflecting change in conditions.

Erosion Control

Erosion control measures for certain sites will be re-visited this year with some available advisory assistance via Soil Conservation Services. The Mt Breckin Project can only assist with supply of small scale erosion materials such as jute mesh, geofabric, coir (coconut fibre) logs, grass seed and native plants. A couple of creek sites in need of some revegetation have benefited from the supply of 300 native tubestock sourced from the local Riverdene Nursery.

Eco-Survey Walks

As we approach spring we will be planning for some eco-survey walks with interested landholders from the Mt Breckin area. These walks aim to involve small groups of landholders with an interest in learning more about what native plants and animals occupy Mt Breckin and to provide a way to collect this information together. The motion detection cameras have already assisted in identifying some of the native fauna present.

These walks will need to be planned around any further pest animal trapping and/or baiting as human scent could disrupt this activity. Anyone interested in their property being a location for one of these walks can contact Hunter LLS Officer Lorna Adlem on 0437 967 311.



Left: Red-necked Wallaby (*Macropus rufogriseus*) – also known as Bennetts Wallaby – with joey following behind.
Right: Wedge-tailed eagle (*Aquila audax*) making a landing on the top of Mt Breckin.

More information

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Acknowledgments:

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