

Mount Breckin Project

Newsletter # 1

HUNTER LOCAL LAND SERVICES

August 2019

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 first 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

Since initially researching a project for the Mount Breckin area in 2017/2018, and securing funding from the NSW Environmental Trust in late 2018, the Mount Breckin Project is now well and truly into its first year.

The project will run for a total of 3 years as a first stage pilot, with a possible second stage depending on how well the project delivers its activities and objectives.

Activities include pest animal control, weed control, biodiversity surveys, minor erosion control and revegetation with the aim of involving up to 20 landholders across the area. To date 14 landholders have come on board with the project in some shape or form.

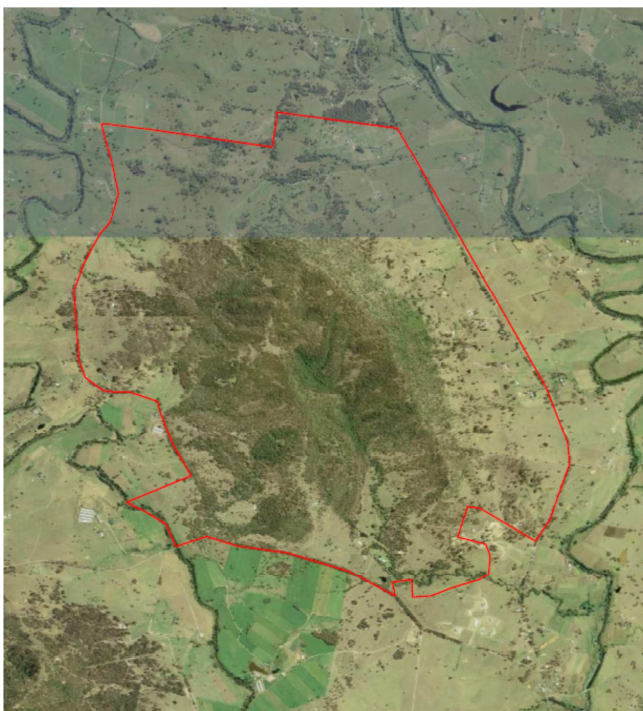


Figure 1: Mt Breckin Project Area

The project aims to provide participating landholders with accredited training in pest animal control and an ongoing coordinated approach to managing pest animals, contract labour to assist with weed control, materials to address minor erosion issues, native tubestock/grass seed to revegetate eroded areas, creeks and gullies, and opportunities to participate in ecological survey walks and traditional cool burns (firestick land management) to reduce fuel load.

An initial landholder workshop was held in December 2018 attended by 18 Mt Breckin residents. The workshop gave an overview of the project and how to participate. A number of landholders expressed their interest for certain activities with pest animal control being of the most interest, closely followed by weed control.

Pest Animal Control

In late June 2019 Hunter LLS held a Pest Animal Control training workshop on a host property at Mt Breckin. Professional wild dog trapper Helen Leake has been engaged by Hunter LLS to assist with coordinating a trapping and baiting program for Mt Breckin with participating landholders. Wild dogs have been a growing issue this year with incidents of attacks and sightings being reported.



Trapping demonstration by Helen Leake at the Pest Animal workshop. Setting and concealing a trap to ensure no visible signs of disturbance takes significant care. Trap completely hidden (centre bottom photo)



Training manual

A Pest Animal Management Plan will be developed for Mt Breckin with ongoing annual control programs recommended. Other pest animals also to be targeted are rabbits and foxes.

Sensory cameras (below left) are being installed on some properties across the mountain to capture footage of both pest and native animals. Our first batch of photo footage from two properties has captured a high level of fox traffic, wild dog presence (below centre), with appearances of brush-tailed possums, plenty of wallabies, an echidna and a large black cat (below right - or small black panther!).



Weed Control

The two main weeds of concern across Mt Breckin are Lantana and African Olive. Hunter LLS staff have been coordinating site visits with landholders to assess weed load and to offer assistance with containing and reducing these weeds. Some properties have already received some initial weed control work on African Olive. The highest incidence of African Olive appears to be on the eastern and northern sides of the mountain, with Lantana quite prevalent throughout.

It is anticipated that further weed control work will continue this spring season with two contractors being engaged by Hunter LLS to undertake initial and one follow-up treatment on participating properties. Landholders signing up for weed control assistance have agreed to monitor and manage treated sites for at least the following 5 years to keep these areas weed free.

Biodiversity at Mount Breckin

Did you know that there are populations of koalas living at Mt Breckin?

Through the project we will aim to discover more about what's at Mt Breckin by looking at what species of fauna and flora the area holds. Mt Breckin is one of the remnant vegetation 'stepping stones' leading up to Barrington Tops but little is known of what is present there in terms of biodiversity. We know that there are open woodlands of Spotted Gum-Ironbark, as well as signs of Hunter Valley Dry Rainforest, and landholders have reported sightings of koalas, phascogales and quolls.

Hunter LLS will be coordinating small group walks with landholders interested in learning more about what plants and animals are present. Walks will be held on agreed host properties, and will be led by an ecologist. There will be opportunity to learn more about habitat areas, involve in recording what is found and how to look for trace signs of animals.



Koala sighted on a property at Mt Breckin in January this year.

More information

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Acknowledgments:

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