

B2. Community Involvement

Local governments play a vital role in encouraging; facilitating, educating and supporting the community towards biodiversity conservation in local government-managed public natural areas.

In the Perth Metropolitan Region alone, around 300 community bushcare groups existed in 2003 (Stenhouse, 2005). Volunteers provide an important resource in assisting local government to achieve improved environmental outcomes. They contribute in on-ground works and often spend significant amounts of time each week, month and year working towards environmental goals.

Community volunteers are often genuinely concerned about their local natural areas. Research has shown (Stenhouse, 2005) that community volunteers are further motivated to volunteer because of positive experiences gained through volunteering and these points may be used in attracting new volunteers:

- increased skills/knowledge;
- visible environmental results;
- social interaction;
- personal development;
- sense of achievement and purpose; and
- community involvement.

Community involvement in bushcare brings other benefits to the local government and wider community such as:

- increased ability to attract external funding for biodiversity conservation management actions;
- increased capacity to implement necessary management actions;
- increased community awareness regarding local biodiversity values;
- greater social cohesion; and
- increased appreciation of local natural areas.

The capacity of local governments to improve environmental outcomes can be built through community involvement. It is therefore important for local governments to support and encourage community involvement in bushland management. In order to build, increase and maintain volunteer engagement, local government could provide:

- a sound policy platform;
- a 'Friends' group manual;
- volunteer insurance;
- resources such as relevant references, tools, safety equipment and plants;
- a bushcare officer to facilitate volunteers;
- assistance with community grant applications;
- access to training;
- promotion of volunteer activities (website/newsletter/community papers); and
- recognition of volunteer achievements and contributions to bushcare.

An example of success in community involvement is the award-winning Eastern Hills Catchment Management Project (EMCMP). Four local governments; the Shire of Mundaring, the City of Swan, the Shire of Kalamunda and the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council have formed a partnership whereby various resources are shared. For

example, there is a shared newsletter, and equal access to training through the “Bush Skills for the Hills” training workshops.

The Shire of Kalamunda Friends Group Manual is available on the Shire’s website:

<http://www.kalamunda.wa.gov.au/Publications/Friends+Group+Manual/Default.htm>.

This document provides comprehensive explanations about: local government policy; direction for volunteers/groups; registration; provision of assistance; safety considerations; insurance and public liability; bushcare activities; bushland management activities schedule; funding; training; external contacts/resources; and standard template forms for friends groups.

For more information regarding the Shire of Kalamunda Friends Group Manual, contact the Environmental Reserves Officer, Karen Britza, ph: 92579806 or email:

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