



STEP Matters

Number 171 July 2013

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TALKS

Held at 8 pm, St Andrews, corner Chisholm Street and Vernon Street, Turrumurra

6 August — Sophia Findlay (Water and Catchments Program Leader at Ku-ring-gai Council) will talk about water

10 September — Dr Catherine Chagué-Goff (UNSW and Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation) What do Tsunamis and a Harley Davidson have in Common?

WALKS

21 July — Harbour Foreshore and History Circuit

Time: 9 am, 4 h duration
Meet: Eastern side of Rhodes Railway Station
Grade: Medium, 13 km flat walking
RSVP: Jill Green (jillpgreen@gmail.com, 9489 8256) bookings recommended)

1 September — Royal National Park

This walk has probably the most accessible display of the beautiful pink swamp heath (*Sprengelia incarnata*) anywhere in the park,

and this is only one of the many, varied and spectacular flowers of the (endangered) Coastal Upland Swamp community. Late August is this community's peak flowering time. The route extends to Winifred Falls on South West Arm Creek, a perfect lunch spot. Return route crosses Anice Falls which is a delightful small waterfall, and journeys back across swampy heaths ablaze with wildflowers.

It's an upland swamp environment so tracks are usually wet under foot and can be muddy, so good footwear is recommended, as are trekking poles. There is a wet (but not slippery) crossing at Winifred Falls (but it's only water, and it's more than worth it to see the falls!) lunch break at Winifred Falls — pace relaxed, lots of things to stop and look at!

Time: 10.15 for 10.30 am, 3 to 4 h duration
Meet: Entrance to the Mt Bass Trail on the left side of the Bundeena Road, 2.5 km from the turnoff from Bertram Stevens Drive (enter park via Audley, park entry \$11 unless you have a NPWS sticker)

Get there: By car, approx 1 h 20 min from Upper North Shore (but allow a 10 to 15 min margin);

Grade: Moderate, 6 km, consists of fire trail and well-defined but poorly maintained walking tracks; short, steep, slow, stony descents and climbs to and from waterfalls
Bring: Lunch, snacks, camera, good footwear, plant ID books, sunscreen (heathland vegetation provides little sun shelter)

RSVP: John Martyn (9449 7962, 0425 830 260 johnmartyn@optusnet.com.au) bookings recommended



Pink swamp heath, Mt Bass Trail

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STATE ENVIRONMENT NEEDS YOUR HELP!

The environment needs your help. Since 1978 STEP has been happy to represent our 400 members on environmental issues but unfortunately now submissions from organisations only count as one voice for the environment. We understand that the analysis of submissions focuses on counting the number of submissions arguing for or against particular issues. It is now quantity not quality that matters.

STEP would like to enlist the members' help on important issues, for example the changes to Garigal, Ku-ring-gai Chase, Marramarra and Berowra Valley National Park's Plans of Management. We will be writing submissions and we would like to email all members with copies of these submissions and ask every member to submit a comment on these vital issues. Please feel free to use our submissions as a basis for your comment but individualise your comments so that a new voice is heard.

LOCAL NEWS

Tuesday 9 July – NAIDOC Day

Time: 10 am to 4 pm

Place: Jenkins Hall, Lane Cove National Park

We will be sharing the work of Gordon Syron, the father of urban contemporary Aboriginal art.

Activities include:

- paint a mural with the good folk from the Tribal Warrior Association
- outback trek indigenous car display
- art and craft activities
- native tucker tasting

Will be held rain, hail or shine. No bookings required.

Sunday 7 July – Waratah Park Working Bee

Time: 9 am to 1.30 pm

Place: 13 Namba Road, Duffys Forest

The iconic home of Skippy has been neglected for the past 15 years and the weeds have invaded. A dedicated group of local volunteers have been working on the site. Assistance with the working bee would be much appreciated. Bring the usual hat, gloves and drink required for gardening activities plus, if possible, gardening equipment.

Waratah Park is under very serious threat of having the whole 13.4 hectares bulldozed for housing within the next 12 months. Perhaps it can be saved if it can be shown to contain bushland that should be preserved.

For more information see

<http://duffysforest.com/index.php/waratah-park/about-waratah>.

SCHOOL HABITAT DAY PROGRAM

The Gibberagong Education Centre at Bobbin Head, part of the Department of Education, is involved in a very interesting School Habitat Day program. The program has been running for about three years and sounds hugely successful in teaching children about the environment. The children are in years 3 and 4 and are assisted by local high school mentors.

Each year a particular species and its habitat are chosen for study. Previous subjects have been Fairy Penguin at Manly and the Booroolong Frog at Tumbarumba. This year it is the Powerful Owl in Ku-ring-gai.

Firstly, the children are taught about the species and their habitat via activities at the Zoo and a Zoo snooze.

Next the schools have a habitat day where they can find out more about the species in their local area and how their community could act to improve their habitat. The Ku-ring-gai Habitat Days will be held in August. In the case of the Powerful Owl emphasis could be on understanding the forests that owls prefer to nest and feed in, their prey and their predators. This will require an understanding of tree characteristics and the forest understorey where owls need to fly.

During the final part of the program the children develop projects to improve the habitat for the owls. At the end of the program the schools hold a display of the children's projects. We may see signs of their work around the neighbourhood.

Interested members of the local community are welcome to offer to participate in the Habitat Days. For more information contact Brad Crossman at the Gibberagong Education Centre (<http://www.gibberagong-e.schools.nsw.edu.au>).

HORSE RIDING AND MOUNTAIN BIKE TRACKS — AMENDMENTS TO NATIONAL PARKS' PLANS OF MANAGEMENT

As highlighted in the article about Stringybark Ridge (see p4–5), well-organised pressure groups are trying to gain additional access to Sydney's national parks for their activities despite the additional damage that will be done to the conservation values of these parks.

The draft amendments to the Plans of Management (PoM) applicable to these parks to allow these additional activities have recently been released and can be found at www.environment.nsw.gov.au/consult. The documents to be amended can be found at www.environment.nsw.gov.au/parkmanagement/ParkManagementPlans.

The general public is invited to comment and the closing date for submissions is 15 July 2013. See the website for details.

Mountain Bike Tracks – Garigal National Park

Previous issues of *STEP Matters* have covered the current and previous State Governments' decisions to install mountain biking facilities in national parks. The current Government is bowing to pressure from vocal mountain bike riders to push through tracks in Garigal despite the significant effect this will have on quality bushland. STEP participated in some on-site meetings held to discuss the suitability of possible routes but it was clear that our views would be ignored.

The proposed track is in two parts that will eventually be linked through Forestville Park to provide a track 6.45 km long. The eastern track will use existing management trails but then a track will be constructed to go near the Bluff Lookout, a place with magnificent views (see photo) and above the Bluff Track before turning up to the existing Engravings management trail. The western track will use the Currie Road management trail but a new track is proposed to cut back through bushland lower in the valley across the Natural Bridge Track.



The construction of these tracks is expected to reduce the creation of unauthorised tracks that are causing considerable damage to sensitive swampy areas some of which have significant aboriginal heritage values and engravings.

However this depends on the NPWS having the resources to close off these tracks and monitor future activity as well as the cooperation of mountain bike riders.

The Review of Environmental Factors identifies particular ecological features found in the area such as coastal upland swamps, an endangered ecological community (*STEP Matters*, [Issue 168](#), p10–12). Construction will use measures to minimise damage to these areas, for example by using raised ramps.

STEP's [Position Paper on Bushland Tracks and Trails](#) states that these tracks should only be constructed in degraded bushland. The new tracks will involve the destruction of quality bushland. However the Office of Environment and Heritage is determined that this proposal should go ahead in the interests of tourism development.

Horse Riding

Given its proximity to popular horse riding areas the Metropolitan North East Region has been selected as a priority region for new horse riding areas. The PoM amendments have been developed after consultation undertaken by the NPWS with horse riding groups. No community environmental groups were invited to join.

Under the draft amendment to the PoM for Ku-ring-gai Chase three existing (bushfire) management trails are set to be opened to horse riding while the opening of another six is subject to environmental assessment, land tenure approvals and budget allocation.

Several of these trails extend well into bushland along ridge tops above Cowan Creek near Bobbin Head. Surely the environmental assessment should have been carried out before the possible routes were mooted. An expectation has been created that these trails will eventuate.

New trails are also proposed for Garigal and Marramarra. Details of the locations of these new trails are provided in the draft amendments.

Signage on existing trails says nothing about the need to collect manure to ensure that excessive nutrients will not enter delicate bushland. Once established, the continuing use of these trails will be subject to assessment of impacts over the first three years and measures taken to minimise these impacts. This is not sufficient time to assess whether extra nutrients are harming the ecosystem.

We urge members to make their views known to the Government on both the horse riding and mountain bike tracks proposals by making a submission by 15 July.

STRINGYBARK RIDGE: SYMBOLIC OF THE CHALLENGES FACING NSW CONSERVATION

STEP members may recall that a 2010 article in *STEP Matters* ([Issue 154](#), p4–5) warned that the future of our urban national parks as conservation areas lay in the balance. The then State (Labor) Government seemed to us to be in lock step with many sporting, political, commercial and community interest groups who appeared to be in hot pursuit of urban open space to pursue their particular objectives. National parks were a primary target.

We received a mixed reaction, with some suggesting that we were simply a bunch of anti-development alarmists who were trying to stop legitimate new uses for public lands. We were reminded that a NSW Government taskforce had concluded in 2007 that it was ‘important to consider enhancing and developing new nature based experiences either adjacent to, or where appropriate, in national parks and reserves’.

We were assured that any such developments would be safely conducted under the auspices of the then Department of the Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECC), whose web charter specifically proclaimed that they ‘provided the cornerstone of conservation, along with linked community efforts, through the management of national parks ... to protect nature and cultural heritage’.

So the question therefore is how well has DECC, now known as the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) performed its role of national park and conservation management over the past three years? Has it indeed been the ‘cornerstone of conservation’? Has it always acted to ‘protect nature’?

The evidence would seem to suggest not. Since the new State Government was elected we have seen a stream of new developments which indicate that conservation is in fact no longer the cornerstone of OEH. In particular, activities long considered by scientists as being totally incompatible with the preservation of natural areas have been introduced. This is true of both urban and non-urban national parks.

In this regard, Dr Carol Booth (co-editor of *Wildlife Australia*) has noted, *inter alia* the following developments introduced by the new Coalition Government (from *Nature NSW*, Winter 2013):

- The introduction of ‘recreational’ hunting in 77 national parks.
- Horse riding trails widely extended and now even permitted in some wilderness areas.

- New tracks for mountain bikes being both approved and funded (while funding for weed eradication and similar is cut back).
- Logging trials have recently been approved for the Murray Valley National Park, with the logging industry now also lobbying for further access to northern NSW parks.
- Grazing trials have been approved to occur in red gum and cypress forest parks.
- Laws to facilitate commercial tourism and retail outlets in parks were introduced in 2010.
- Meanwhile park budgets have been cut.

It is of course simplistic to only blame the OEH. The office falls under the Premiers Department and Minister Robyn Parker reports directly to the Premier and is apparently closely managed. ‘Realpolitik’ priorities seem to have unfortunately resulted in conservation priorities (despite earlier Coalition assurances to the contrary) being ignored, with deals done with the Shooters Party and other well organised lobby and user groups.

There is apparently more of the same to come and these developments are not necessarily all at a NSW wide level, although the ramifications could well end being felt state-wide. Members may also recall that in 2012 we published an article titled *The Curious Saga of Stringybark Ridge* (*STEP Matters*, [Issue 165](#), p2-4).

This article traced a set of rather tawdry events in the Hornsby Shire with regard to the Berowra Valley National Park, then still a regional park. The summary point was that a gaggle of local community sporting groups seemed to be working with, or trying to persuade, local politicians in the area to allow for the construction of a range of team sporting facilities and amenities within the boundaries of the park. This would necessarily have included the dismantling of the existing legal protection for the area, which specifically precluded such developments.

STEP was alarmed at the precedent this would set for all national parks in NSW and made representations on the matter to both the Minister and the Premier. In these we recognised the legitimate needs of community groups to have access to sporting facilities and suggested, as a ‘win/win’ solution, that local high school sporting grounds be upgraded and shared with community user groups when they were not being used, typically in the evenings and over weekends. This was based on successful trials of a similar nature at both Cherrybrook and Narrabeen High Schools.

The Premier encouragingly replied that the Department of Education and Communities *Facilities Policy* ‘encourage schools to make their facilities available for use by the community outside of school hours’. The

Environment Minister however signalled that the Park was still being considered for the use of recreational sporting activities. As this was actually illegal under the park's current Plan of Management (PoM), the way around it, according to the Minister, would be to consider altering the PoM when it was next revised. This would not, we were assured, happen without the usual 'extensive consultation with the community, Council and other stakeholders'.



Stringybark Ridge walking trail Wild Walks

Apparently the early stages of this community consultation phase have now commenced, although STEP has not as yet been directly involved. An online survey, launched in April with limited publicity and open for only some three weeks, nevertheless evoked some strong public reaction from local Pennant Hills' residents. They felt that some of the questions in the survey were asking residents to comment on proposals which may well be illegal and should not therefore have been asked. This was based on advice from the Principal Solicitor of the Environmental Defenders Office, who had previously advised that current development plans for sports fields on this site would infringe the NPW Act in a number of areas.

The Stringybark Ridge site was once previously used for a while as a pony club, but that activity ended more than two decades ago and all associated amenities removed. Significant bushland remediation work by Hornsby Council since then has meant that today little evidence remains of those long past activities. It is in fact now one of the relatively few significant ridge top sites within urban national park boundaries. Notwithstanding, it would appear that the Government may be determined to deliver an outcome which is not only contrary to good conservation practise but is also currently illegal.

This approach seems to encapsulate a dangerously cynical attitude by our Government towards the approval of damaging activities within our parks, knowing full well that

they are likely to harm conservation efforts but apparently not caring. The list of developments noted above by Dr Booth is clear evidence of this fact. This trend has recently caused the Kevin Evans, CEO of the National Parks Association of NSW, to comment that:

Unfortunately, the honest use of science has come second to placating recreational and industry lobby groups in recent NSW government decisions on our oceans and national parks.

(from *Nature NSW South Wales Winter 2013*)

STEP fears that the intended outcome of the community consultation process set up by the State Government is to amend the PoM so as to allow the construction of the new sports fields. STEP itself has recently been involved in the community consultation phase looking at allowing mountain bike tracks to be built inside certain national parks and we have come away feeling disappointed and somewhat used. In retrospect the outcomes now always seemed to have been preordained and we should perhaps have saved ourselves the indignity of lending credence to a flawed process.

If approved, Stringybark Ridge will establish a precedent which other well organised pressure groups will likely use in an attempt to have new team sporting facilities and amenities to be built in national parks throughout New South Wales. A netball complex here, a BMX track over there, more space for team sports somewhere else. All perfectly understandable, but the death of a thousand cuts for our already small amount of land set aside for conservation.

There is of course little we can do in the short term if our elected representatives simply ignore their local electorate conservation interests in favour of well organised lobby groups and clubs. We are however fearful that the in the longer term we in Australia will begin to parallel the current political impasse in the USA, where well-funded and organised lobby groups routinely manage to overwhelm the will of the majority on a range of fundamentally important issues, including climate change, clean energy and better gun control.

Perhaps the members of moderate environmental groups such as STEP have stayed quiet for too long and that it is now time to speak up? A good way to do so is to pick the phone or the drop a letter or email to the Minister (office@parker.minister.nsw.gov.au) or your local MP, letting him or her know how you feel about the matter. After all, the lobby groups do so all the time.

PLANNING SYSTEM WHITE PAPER, DRAFT LEGISLATION AND SYDNEY METROPOLITAN STRATEGY

The opportunity for members of the public to comment on the new planning system as described in the White Paper is now over. Only two and a half months was provided for the public (and parliamentarians) to understand these complex and lengthy documents.

Peak bodies such as the Better Planning Network, Environmental Defender's Office NSW and the Nature Conservation Council attended many meetings with the planning bureaucrats and contributed to community forums. They have provided detailed explanations and submission outlines to assist with the preparation of submissions.

This is complex legislation that will have a profound impact on the future development and way of life of NSW residents. STEP is very concerned about the way the new legislation has been introduced. Extensive consultation took place prior to the release of this White Paper. The previous discussion document, the Green Paper, drew hundreds of submissions but it seems little notice has been taken of the public's views.

The NSW Government also wants to finalise the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy before the new planning system is in place. If this happens there will be major transitional issues. The Metropolitan Strategy will be the regional plan for Sydney under the new planning system and yet the detailed community review of the plan has not taken place.

STEP has asked for the Metropolitan Strategy to be delayed and finalised under the new planning system.

Extract from our Submission

STEP is opposed to many aspects of the proposals set out in the White Paper and draft Planning Bill. These concerns are outlined below:

- **The removal of ecologically sustainable development as the definition of the basic principle applied to planning is not acceptable.** Planning must consider development based on the integration of factors that will define the qualities of life and the environment as well as economic measures into the future. These factors should demonstrate that the goals of intergenerational equity and conservation of biological diversity are being secured.
- **Community participation.** Local experience has shown that the community is generally only motivated and in a position to comment on changes to their

local area when a specific development is proposed. Under the changes proposed in the White Paper community assessment occurs in the early planning stages when residents will be unaware of whether or how proposals will affect their environment. The community must be involved at all stages. Also the time proposed for consultation of a minimum of 28 days is inadequate for complex regional plans.

- **Strategic planning principles.** The planning system must have specific outcomes such as improving water quality, maintenance of wildlife corridors and protecting environmentally sensitive areas. It is not enough to have 'regard to general environmental and social considerations'. The system needs to ensure that adequate data is provided for the community to make a meaningful contribution to strategic planning.
- **The loss of existing environmental protection.** Existing environmental protection instruments such as SEPP 14 and 19 were based on sound scientific research and had a very positive impact on the environment of NSW. Under the transition to the new system, these are at risk of being weakened or lost.
- **The proposal to reduce the number of environment zones.** Areas such as Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council and Hornsby Shire Council have complex environments including National Parks and Nature Reserves, council managed bushland and open spaces as well as large areas of environmentally important land on private property. These urban forests are essential for the maintenance of the seedbank and biodiversity that are a core part of the resilience of wildlife and vegetation corridors. These are currently recognized by E3 and E4 zonings but will be subsumed into general rural and residential zonings. Provisions in the White Paper are not sufficient to conserve these environments that are the reason a large percentage of Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai residents choose to live in these shires.
- **The proposal to introduce strategic compatibility certificates.** It is not appropriate to allow developers to override existing planning controls while plans are being developed under the new system.
- **The composition of the subregional planning boards.** Persons with expertise in natural resource management, conservation and ecology must be on each board.

- **Eighty per cent of all development will be determined as complying or code assessment development.** Detailed environmental assessment is needed for many developments in Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai as developments will impact on the fingers of bushland and lengthy riparian areas in both local government areas. The community will need to participate in assessment of developments to ensure that the natural environments of Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai are conserved.
- **Prevention of third party environmental appeals or judicial review proceedings.** This severely limits the ability of community members and groups to initiate merit review proceedings or use open standing provision to remedy breaches of the Act

STEP is pleased about efforts to improve environmental impact statements and believe the government should introduce a scheme for accreditation and independent appointment of environmental consultants.

The NSW Government's 2021 Plan includes the goals of 'protecting the natural environment' and 'restoring confidence and integrity in the planning system'. The planning system as defined in the White Paper and draft legislation cannot achieve these goals. Instead the driving force of the proposals is the accommodation of the demands for rapid economic and population growth. The imposition of this level of growth on the people of NSW will create environmental and social degradation as well as excessive costs of needs for new infrastructure. We will all be worse off in the longer term future.

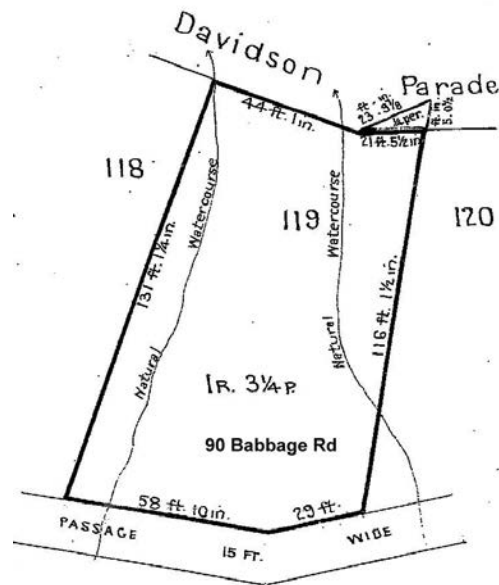
KU-RING-GAI COUNCIL REZONING OF COMMUNITY LAND

The public hearing report on Ku-ring-gai Council rezoning of community land has been released. Of the three sites only 21 Calga Street, Roseville Chase has been recommended for retention as community land, principally because it is within a 100 year flood zone. The Council should have commissioned detailed reports in the first place and saved the community a lot of unnecessary anguish and expense.

90 Babbage Road, Roseville Chase, currently a natural area, has been recommended for reclassification to allow rezoning and sale. This decision is based primarily on the report from SLR Consultants that STEP believes has some serious errors.

The watercourse on this site is stated to be on the next door block, no 92. A search on old property title records shows that there were two natural watercourses on 90 Babbage Rd (see

fig below). Inspection during recent rain showed the remnants of both watercourses on 90 Babbage Rd were still flowing. No natural watercourses were recorded on property titles for 92 Babbage Rd. However the SLR report states (p iii) - "The gully receives stormwater from a 300mm concrete pipe and headwall located in the north eastern corner of the 92 Babbage Road property." But the pipe and headwall are actually located on public land above the north western corner of 90 Babbage Road where the original mapped watercourse was.



Map from 1933 certificate of title for 90 Babbage Rd (then Davidson Parade)

The SLR report concludes – “the steep grade, limited vegetation cover and fast flowing stormwater events provide little attenuation of stormwater pollutants to Middle Harbour.” The consultant made no attempt to look at the sites when rain commenced. STEP observed during recent rain a considerable delay in stormwater flow as it was absorbed in the deep sandy soil. The main watercourse on 90 Babbage Rd has extensive tree cover with dense surface roots. Near the base of this watercourse all the flow was absorbed for several hours and there was no discharge to the lower side street.

STEP has serious concerns that this publicly exhibited document was misleading. It has shown the stormwater pipe and headwall to be totally in the wrong place . It is also our view that the matters raised in the public submissions were not adequately addressed in the Public Hearing Report. For these reasons STEP will be seeking an independent review of 90 Babbage Rd and the public hearing process.

NEW STORMWATER TREATMENT AND HARVESTING SYSTEM IN THORNLEIGH

David Bolton, Catchment Remediation Education Officer, Natural Resources, Hornsby Shire Council

As part of the Catchments Remediation Rate (CRR) Capital Works program, Hornsby Shire Council recently completed construction of a combined bioretention basin and stormwater harvesting system at the corner of Dawson Avenue and Ferguson Drive, Thornleigh.

Key objectives of the project were:

- to improve the quality of stormwater runoff entering the Upper Lane Cove River;
- to harvest stormwater for sports field irrigation; and
- to reduce weed infestation and encourage the regeneration of native vegetation.

Located within the headwaters of the Lane Cove River catchment, the system provides a vegetated sand filter (or bioretention basin) to capture, treat and store stormwater runoff before it flows into Lane Cove National Park.

Stormwater pollutants are removed through filtration and biological uptake. The filter media and plants work together to adsorb heavy metals, nutrients and hydrocarbons. The treated stormwater is collected in storage cells (similar in appearance to 'milk crates') and pumped to nearby Thornleigh Oval for irrigation purposes.

The site was selected due to localised impacts from stormwater draining from the surrounding residential area. Sedimentation and nutrient rich runoff had created ideal conditions for exotic weeds that extended down the drainage line into national park bushland.



Lane Cove NPWS staff, STEP members and even students from Macquarie University were involved in the initial scoping of the project. Some initial concerns were raised about the proposed footprint of works and plans were amended accordingly. All stakeholders then provided in-principle support for the project.

Construction involved major earthworks, including rock walls and earth batters. The basin was then made watertight by the installation of a plastic liner before the water storage cells, filter media and plants were installed.

Upkeep of the system is scheduled under an ongoing council asset maintenance program funded by the CRR.

HUNTING IN NATIONAL PARKS

The implementation of hunting in national parks is still on hold pending the results of the governance review of the suitability of the Game Council to administer recreational hunting. We understand the report has been completed but the Minister of the Environment has not received a copy.

We thank all STEP members who signed the petition against the hunting legislation. A total of 11,700 written signatures have been received. This National Parks Association of NSW petition was tabled in Parliament this month by the Member for Sydney, Alex Greenwich. As there are over 10,000 signatures, the issue will be debated in the People's Parliament. This will be another opportunity for members of parliament to highlight the failings of the proposal.

WHAT IS BLUE CARBON?

Robin Buchanan, STEP Vice-president

Blue carbon has recently been in the news (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2013) but what is it?

Blue carbon is carbon locked up in the soils of coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, sea grasses and salt marshes (see www.thebluecarbonproject.com/the-problem-2). It is coming under increasing interest as the organic matter in soils of these wet environments is not completely broken down by cellular respiration to rapidly release carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere. These wet soils can therefore sequester carbon for thousands of years, unlike forests where soil carbon is released back into the atmosphere relatively quickly.

The advantage of high sequestration rate, permanence, low fire risk, low saturation potential, and self-expansion potential of coastal vegetation is obvious (Table 1). These coastal wetlands occupy only 2% of the world's sea bed but are responsible for 50% of the carbon transfer to ocean sediments (CSIRO 2013). Indeed the blue carbon sinks and estuaries capture and store the equivalent of up to half the carbon emissions from the entire global transport sector every year (WetlandCare Australia 2008).

This new perspective on coastal ecosystems adds enormous value to those already known; for example coastal protection, and food, shelter and nursery areas for approximately 70% of the fish we eat (WetlandCare Australia 2008).

The Blue Carbon Policy Framework (Herr *et al.* 2011) aims to guide and coordinate the activities of blue carbon stakeholders including non-government agencies, government, private sector and research

institutions and from marine and the climate change communities. This framework is designed to allow for inclusion of blue carbon activities into existing international policy and processes.

In Australia the CSIRO, seven universities (including the UNSW and UTS) as well as the Australian Institute of Marine Science have formed the 'Marine and Coastal Carbon Biogeochemistry Cluster' (CSIRO 2013). Projects are diverse and include evaluation of primary productivity, carbon sequestration, complex chemical reactions and interactions between pelagic (surface) and benthic (bottom) ecosystems. Mapping of Australia's coastal and marine ecosystems is underway (University of Western Australia 2013).

Locally the Hawkesbury River, Pittwater, Middle Harbour and the Lane Cove River have an abundance of coastal ecosystems; time to fight even harder for their protection and regeneration and to incorporate blue carbon into grant applications.

References

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www.csiro.au/Coastal-Carbon-Cluster

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Table 1. Comparison of coastal and terrestrial vegetation carbon storage

Characteristic	Coastal vegetation	Terrestrial forests
Sequestration rate (gC/m ² /yr)	high: marsh 210, mangrove 139, seagrass 83	low: tropical 2, temperate 1–12, boreal 1–2
Sequestration permanence	high	low
Fire risk	none	high
Carbon saturation potential	low	high
Area	low	high
Recent loss rate and trend	≈ 1–5% per yr increasing	≈ 0.8% per yr, stable or decreasing
Self-expansion potential	high / rapid	low

NEW FREEWAYS CURE CONGESTION: TIME TO PUT THE MYTH TO BED

The following article, written by Leigh Glover and published in The Conversation, reinforces what STEP has been saying in these newsletters for many years. While new main roads and freeways do add to accessibility and efficiency out of peak periods, they do nothing to relieve congestion because of the demographic feedback effects described in the article. The only way to relieve congestion is to offer commuters acceptable alternatives in the way of public transport and, otherwise, to price road use through tolls and fuel taxes so that demographic feedback effects are reversed and people start making decisions such as living closer to work and catching the bus or train.

The futility of offering roads as the solution is evidenced by the current widening of the M2 — a road that was supposed to relieve congestion quickly, as we predicted, became mired in congestion. And, if you believe that the current widening will have lasting relieving effects, well, you're dreaming!

In the absence of offering commuters a decent alternative they are destined to sit in slower and slower traffic as the city continues to choke itself.



Photo Walter Parenteau

Although the national budget is now apparently \$12 billion in debt, a welter of state governments are pressing the federal government for support to build new freeways. The Victorian Government has just [pledged its support](#) to the \$9 billion [East-West Link](#), and has called for the federal government to chip in. Meanwhile, Sydney's [WestConnex](#) project to extend the M4 and M5 freeways has a price somewhere in the \$10 to 13 billion range, and they want support too.

Justifying such expenditure has seen old freeway myths dusted off and foisted again on the general public by politicians, the popular media, and [road experts who ought to know better](#). Myths such as 'freeways will reduce urban congestion' and 'freeways lower greenhouse gas emissions'. Myths that congestion is a major drag on the economy and freeways will provide more amenity to the outer suburbs.

Transport research and bitter experience have long since laid these claims to rest, but somehow the evidence has been overlooked.

Myth #1: New Freeways Reduce Congestion

Not only is this not true, but new freeways increase overall road use and contribute to worsening congestion. If you want to reduce road congestion — an understandably popular goal in our car-dependent capital cities — the only viable option is to reduce the demand for road space.

Not only does [international research](#) support this fact, local anecdotal experiences reflect it. We are living through an era of urban freeway building, yet [congestion is worsening and travel times are lengthening](#).

Why does this happen? New roads don't just divert existing traffic but also attract new users and keep on doing so until they reach capacity. In transport planning jargon, this is the effect of 'induced traffic'. The more roads you build, the more traffic you have.

There are also associated effects that flow on from building freeways, such as land use decisions that then reinforce car use and car-dependency.

Myth #2: Faster Speeds Reduce Fuel Consumption and Lower Emissions

Given the problem of induced traffic within traffic systems, theoretical savings of fuel and emissions will never eventuate in practice. Cars will not go faster or drive more smoothly, and fuel will not be saved.

Of all the major climate change strategies in the world for transport, none have seriously advocated freeway construction as a way to curb vehicle emissions. Why? It would not work.

Essentially, this is a logical fallacy that assumes what holds true at the individual scale — driving more smoothly reduces emissions — holds true at the systemic scale.

Myth #3. Freeways Help Outer-suburban Communities

If we define increased equity as giving people in the outer suburbs the right to reach CBD-bound congestion sooner, then this claim might be true.

But by any conventional definition, the inequitable access to mobility in the outer suburbs is a result of making those places car dependent. Governments have failed to provide high-quality public transport in, to and from these areas. There is little or no cycle infrastructure, and services within walking distance are rare. Addressing those problems would do far more to provide equity for the outer suburbs.

Inequitable access to education, health, and transport services, especially those needed by young families, is a major issue in our growing cities; it is difficult to see how expenditure on major freeways will meaningfully address these problems.

Myth #4: Road congestion is a Drain on the Economy

In debates over the value of road funding, some very high estimates of congestion costs are circulated; see, for example, the [estimated \\$9.4 billion cost](#) for Australia's congestion in 2005.

On a per capita basis for the nation, this is an extraordinary amount for being delayed in traffic. So if there was no congestion, would the economy financially benefit to this extent? No, because personal travel time isn't included as part of the GDP. So we don't know what the net economic benefits of reduced congestion would be, but they would be considerably less than the aforementioned costs.

Even if freeway building were to reduce congestion (see myth #1), that reduced congestion would not likely add much to the economy.

To be fair, many of the reports in question recognise the limits of these types of assumptions, but their necessary caveats never seem to make it into the media coverage.

Do we really want to stop congestion anyway?

Controversially, congestion might not be the problem, but a part of the solution.

Road congestion performs a crude but effective role — it is a disincentive to road use because of the personal costs it imposes on drivers. Getting stuck in traffic jams makes us consider other ways — or times — to travel.

This kind of 'demand control' of road use can also be achieved by congestion charging. You can see this in London and Singapore, where car commuters pay more if they want to drive on heavily-used roads at times when they're popular.

If we do want to reduce congestion, this is an effective way to do it; more effective than building freeways. But toll roads, road access charging, and road congestion charging are deeply unpopular in the community and among elected politicians (how do you cut the ribbon on a congestion charge?) and are unlikely to become widespread any time soon.

Rather than investing in new freeways under the false promise that road congestion will be relieved, there is a case for letting congestion perform another task. Congestion can give us an incentive to think about other investments in

transport, namely in public and active transport, as a way to effectively reduce the number of cars on our roads and provide viable alternatives to spending ever-increasing time inside slowly moving vehicles.

KEEP LOGGERS OUT OF OUR NATIONAL PARKS



The media has reported (see article on next page) that NSW taxpayers paid \$671 a hectare subsidising the loss-making native forests logging of the Forestry Corporation in the past financial year.

As if that were not bad enough, in order to cut its losses the timber industry now wants to log up to a million hectares of national parks so it can harvest the volumes promised in unsustainable timber supply contracts.

The demand that national parks be opened for logging has received official backing by a state parliamentary inquiry chaired by the Shooters and Fishers Party.

This outrageous move has occurred at the same time that the NSW government is conducting a secretive review of forestry regulations and timber supply options.

Throughout this review, the timber industry has been campaigning to reverse hard-won forestry regulations that protect our threatened wildlife and their habitats.

Premier Barry O'Farrell must resist pressure from the Shooters and Fishers Party and from within his own government to make more forests available for logging and allow other damaging changes to the forestry regulations that protect our unique wildlife and the areas they call home,' Nature Conservation Council CEO Pepe Clarke said.

It is unthinkable that the O'Farrell government would allow the destruction of areas our national parks so the Forestry Corporation can turn a profit.

We have fought hard to ensure protections for our native forests and wildlife and we must not surrender them lightly.

LOGGING NATIONAL PARKS WON'T SAVE THE TIMBER INDUSTRY

Warrick Jordan (National Forest Campaign Manager, Wilderness Society) The Sydney Morning Herald (20 May 2013)

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/logging-national-parks-wont-save-timber-industry-20130519-2junx.html#ixzz2UrSZSTo2>

It should be hardly surprising that a NSW Parliament upper house committee dominated by Shooters and Fishers, National and Liberal MPs would propose logging national parks.

The Shooters and Fishers have used their upper house position to turn the state's protected areas into a game range to live out their pith-helmeted and khaki-clad childhood fantasies. And now they are coming for the forests.

What makes less sense is the short-sighted and self-destructive way parts of the forestry industry have jumped on the bandwagon. Industry bodies such as the Australian Forest Products Association have used the Shooters and Fishers anti-environment agenda to wheel out the tired old refrain that 'things would be just fine if the greenies had not locked up our forests'.

The 'lock up' argument is used time and time again to obscure the fundamental market and competition challenges faced by the native forest industry. Some may claim recent job losses are occurring because of lack of access to forests, but the reality is jobs are being lost because native forest loggers cannot compete.

The plantation forestry industry, the dominant source of structural timbers, continues to take market share from native forests, and is responsible for the overwhelming majority of mill employment in NSW. The high Australian dollar, low costs in overseas production, and sluggish overseas housing markets also mean cheap imports out-compete domestic products.

There is an international glut of high-quality plantation woodchips with top-shelf Forest Stewardship Council environmental accreditation. This means that environmentally destructive native forest export woodchips, which have propped up the competitiveness of the industry in southern NSW and the mid north coast, are extremely difficult to sell.

This is why woodchip plants in Newcastle are idle and the viability of the Eden woodchip mill — which has decimated the forests of the south coast for 40 years — has been raised by politicians and unions.

Logging of koala habitat and water catchments and comprehensive failures to stick to logging laws continue to erode public support.

The industry has been slow to realise that broad community acceptance is not an optional extra: in the hyper-competitive internationalised timber market, social licence and true environmental sustainability are the keys to market access.

The loggers in Tasmania — a state long defined by its entrenched forestry conflict — have recognised that community desire for truly sustainable forestry needs to be embraced, not fought at every turn. It beggars belief that the NSW industry, subject to the same realities in domestic and export markets, would think that opening up national parks and other protected areas would help in securing the industry's future.

Would a customer in a Gosford furniture store buy a dining room setting if they knew its timber was sourced from a conservation area supposedly protecting their drinking water? That Japanese paper companies will happily sell products made from koala habitat logged from a national park? That logging old growth for toilet paper could be acceptable to consumers in this day and age?

Rather than forestry industry representatives riding on the coat-tails of fringe extremists such as the Shooters and Fishers, and playing 'blame-the-greenie', they should be seeking constructive ways to address the real demand and competition issues facing their industry.

The NSW government is faced with a similar challenge. It has yielded to the outrageous demand of allowing shooting in protected areas. Now the Shooters and Fishers expect the government to roll over on logging. The challenge for the state government is to address the fundamental issues facing the forestry industry.

In Victoria, the state's animal emblem, the Leadbeater's possum, is being logged to extinction. In Queensland, Premier Campbell Newman wants to log areas earmarked for national parks, and the federal Coalition has made gutting of environmental laws one of the centrepieces of its policy platform.

The O'Farrell government is allowing the shooters into parks. Some of its members are advocating logging national parks. It is actively pushing the winding back of logging standards and threatened species protections to allow the industry free rein in our forests.

The management of our forests and the security of our protected areas is an opportunity for the O'Farrell government to demonstrate it will not always be beholden to fringe anti-environment interests, that it can cut through the tired arguments, make good environmental and industry policy decisions, and that it understands the people of NSW love their environment and want to experience and protect it, not see it abused.

ABBOTT'S BILLION DOLLAR CARBON HEADACHE

Dermot O’Gorman (Chief Executive, WWF-Australia) *Business Spectator* (24 May 2013) <http://www.businessspectator.com.au/article/2013/5/24/science-environment/abbotts-billion-dollar-carbon-headache#ixzz2UWzXhUwx>

The reverberations from the Newman government’s bulldozing of Queensland’s vegetation protection laws will be felt well beyond the 2 million hectares of native bush now at risk of clearing.

In Canberra right now federal bureaucrats will be doing the maths to work out how this decision will affect Australia’s efforts to cut carbon emissions. Neither side of federal politics will like the answer, but the consequences are most serious for the Coalition’s Direct Action policy.

Up until 2002, land-clearing rates in Queensland were on par with those of Brazil (Figure 1) with an astonishing 300,000 hectares being cleared in some years; the equivalent of one Melbourne Cricket Ground every 4 min. By 2010 the rate of clearing had been reduced significantly, with less than 50,000 hectares cleared annually.

The huge drop in national land clearing rates between 1990 and 2012 — driven predominantly by Queensland — has reduced Australia’s annual national emissions total by close to 75 million tonnes. Without this abatement, Australia’s national emissions would have been around 10% higher than they are today, meaning that we would have significantly overshot our first round Kyoto Protocol target (see Figure 2).

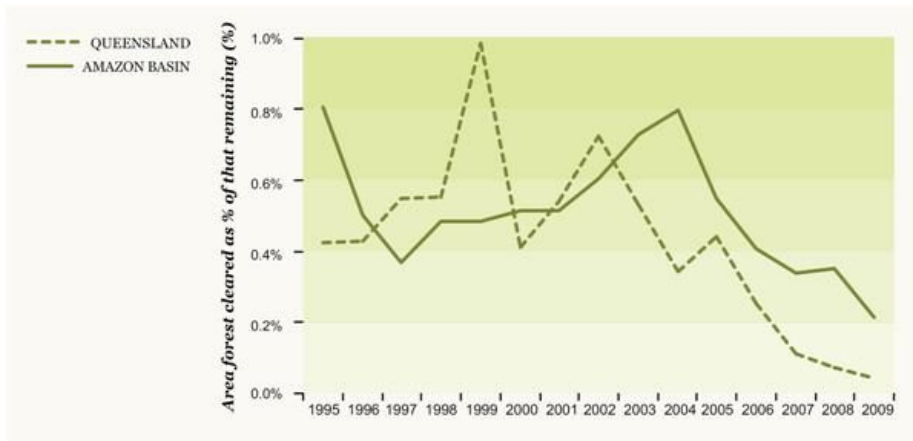


Figure 1. Historic rates of land clearing in Queensland vs the Amazon Basin (Source: Martin Taylor — World Wildlife Fund (2013) [Bushland at Risk of Renewed Land Clearing in Queensland](#))

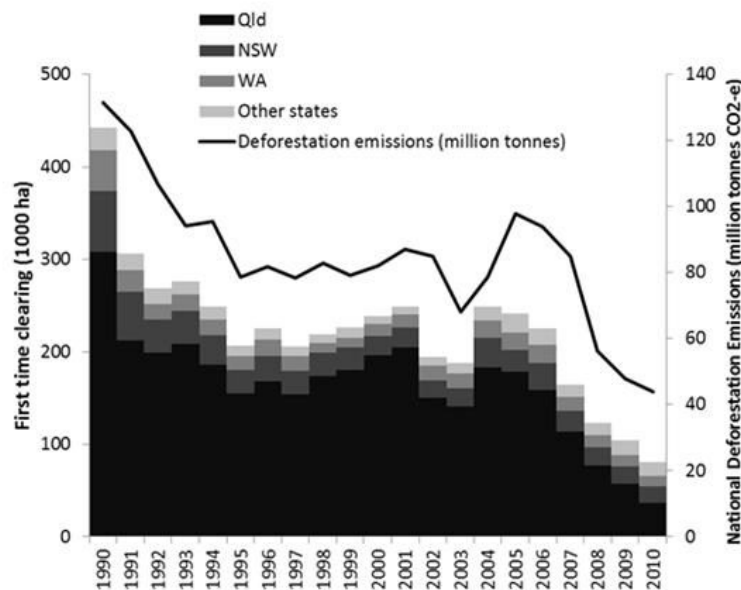


Figure 2. Areas of land cleared for the first time in Queensland compared with other states and deforestation emissions (Source: Martin Taylor — World Wildlife Fund (2013) [Bushland at Risk of Renewed Land Clearing in Queensland](#) and Commonwealth Government (2012) Emission Projections)

The decision in 1997 by the Australian Government to count all of the carbon stored in Queensland trees towards our Kyoto target has been the topic of much debate and consternation. Critics were quick to point out that land clearing laws and the choice of 1990 as the baseline, a particularly bad year for land-clearing, gave the federal government a 75 million tonne free kick towards its Kyoto target.

Putting aside these old debates, it looks like some of this carbon stored in the Queensland bush is now at risk of being released back into the atmosphere.

In a study released by WWF-Australia (http://www.wwf.org.au/news_resources/?6800/Bushland-at-risk-of-renewed-clearing-in-Queensland) it is estimated that the changes in Queensland put at risk carbon stores equivalent to approximately 369 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. This includes 230 million tonnes that is already stored in trees (and up until Tuesday this week was protected under Queensland laws) and another 139 million tonnes that would have been absorbed from the atmosphere from future regrowth.

This does not mean all this carbon is going to be released anytime soon. It merely means it *can* now be cleared without a permit or for an approved large-scale agricultural clearing purpose which had been banned in 2006.

At a time when we as a nation should be banking old wins and looking for new abatement opportunities (such as transforming our energy sector), we are faced with the prospect of having to deal with a completely avoidable blow-out in emissions in Queensland.

So what are the implications for Australia's national climate change policy? Well, the answer depends on which policy is in place in Canberra — the carbon price, or direct action.

Under the existing carbon price mechanism, the main headache caused by increased land-clearing in Queensland is that it chews up a significant chunk of Australia's carbon budget, which means there will be fewer Australian carbon permits for the government to sell to businesses when we shift to a cap-and-trade system in 2015. This means Australian businesses will either need to buy more overseas carbon permits, or make additional investments to reduce their emissions.

Obviously having fewer permits to sell will affect the amount of revenue flowing to the government, but importantly this does not undermine the environmental effectiveness of the carbon price mechanism. Indeed, one of the key strengths of the carbon price mechanism is that it has been intentionally designed to accommodate unanticipated blow-outs in emissions in uncovered sectors. While a blow-out in an uncovered sector may change where the carbon abatement occurs (i.e. overseas or in Australia), the overall national target will still be met.

Crucially important is the fact that having to purchase more international permits does not in any way affect the cost to Australian industry. From 2015 the price businesses pay for an Australian permit will be the same as the price of an international permit.

The headache could be much more severe if Australia shifts to the Direct Action approach to reducing emissions. Under Direct Action, there is a risk that the federal government will need to directly purchase *up to* an additional 369 million tonnes of carbon abatement as a result of increased land clearing in Queensland.

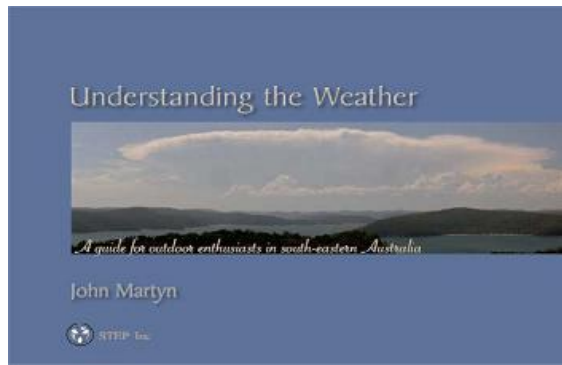
In reality we don't know exactly how much of the newly unprotected bush will be cleared, but even if only 20 per cent of it is cleared, the Coalition could be faced with more than a \$1 billion blow-out in the cost of Direct Action. This assumes a cost \$15 per tonne, which is the same value the Coalition expects to pay for forestry related abatement under direct action.

It is worth noting that the financial risk under the carbon price mechanism is likely to be significantly smaller, because the value of the carbon permits is expected to be lower than \$15 per tonne.

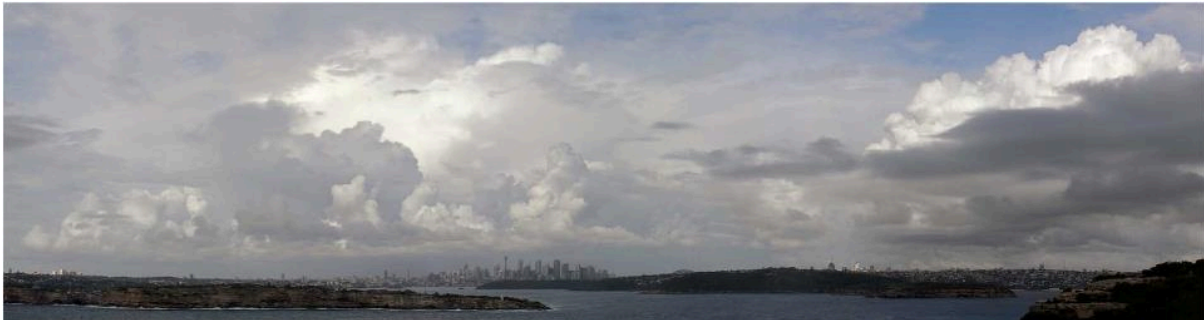
The first victims of this rollback will surely be the koalas, wallabies, cockatoos and other native species that call Queensland's bush home, as well as sustainable agriculture. All up an estimated 163 species of endangered and vulnerable plants and animals will be affected by these new laws, which could see up to 2 million hectares of bush at risk of being bulldozed.

But on the carbon front the Coalition must surely be thinking, has Campbell Newman just given them a billion dollar Direct Action headache?

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Sydney from North Head, cumulonimbus clouds dwarfed Sydney on 11 February 2007 (p74–75, *Understanding the Weather*)

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STEP INFORMATION

STEP Matters

The editor of *STEP Matters* for this edition is Jill Green, who is responsible for all information and articles unless otherwise specifically credited. The STEP committee may not necessarily agree with all opinions carried in this newsletter, but we do welcome feedback and comments from our readers, be they STEP members or not.

All issues (from when we began in 1978) can be viewed online, usually with full-colour illustrations.

Feedback

Send complaints, praise, comments or letters to secretary@step.org.au. Please feel free to share your copy of the newsletter with friends, neighbours and business colleagues.

New Members

New members are always welcome to join STEP and to make themselves available for the committee should they wish to do so. The effectiveness of STEP is a factor of the numbers of members we have, so please encourage your like-minded friends and neighbours to join.

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STEP is moving into the digital age with active Facebook and Twitter sites. Unfortunately the membership is not moving with us! If we are to be effective in pursuing environmental goals we must use the means available to us or risk getting left behind.

A typical response from anyone over about 30 is that they are horrified at the thought — we fear the unknown. So our request to members is that you put fear and prejudice to one side and spend the few minutes necessary to sign up for Twitter and Facebook and follow us. Even more importantly, you will be then able to promote our site to friends and family, especially younger ones.

This may eventually help us recruit new members as well as to market our books and maps. We don't ask a lot of you as members but this is something that takes little time and that can take place in the privacy of your own home. Please think about it!



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