

Caring for Paddock Sentinels

Murrumbidgee Landcare Inc

Planting and Protecting Paddock Trees across the Kyeamba and Tarcutta Valley Landcare Groups

The issue

Paddock trees are keystone structures providing a number of local and landscape ecological functions, including provision of habitat and connectivity for native species. Research has indicated that paddock trees are declining due to natural and accelerated mortality, and most will be lost in less than forty years resulting in an undesirable ecological regime shift. Research also suggests that doing nothing will result in the loss of paddock trees from our landscape, lead to substantial reductions in some Endangered Ecological Communities (EEC) and will negatively affect many native animal species.

The solution

The project developed four factsheets highlighting the importance of paddock trees to the landscape. These were made available to landholders at workshops across the Kyeamba and Tarcutta Valleys. Landholders were also invited to participate in on-ground works activities that included the erection of fencing to protect existing paddock trees and the planting of locally endemic native seedlings. Remuneration was provided to landholders for fencing materials costs, and seedling purchases from the Riverina Highlands Landcare Nursery. Several seed collection field days were also conducted across the life of the project to enhance landholder skills in native tree identification, seed collection and propagation.

The impact

Throughout the project, seventeen landholders participated in on-ground activities that resulted in 750 locally endemic native seedlings planted, and 50 existing paddock trees protected from stock. Landholders were encourage to purchase their seedlings from the Riverina Highlands Landcare Nursery, and to preference dominant species (White box - *Eucalyptus albens* , Yellow box - *E. melliodora* , Blakely's red gum - *E. blakelyi*) from the endangered ecological community (EEC) found in the region. This box gum grassy woodland is the preferred habitat for eight threatened animal species found in the two valleys.

Learnings

Despite seventeen landholders successfully completing their on-ground works activities, the prolonged drought throughout most of 2018 to the end of 2019 stymied the confidence of many landholders in participating in tree planting. Survival rates were low during much of the project, however landholders were offered replacement seedlings towards the end of the project, as it became clear that planting conditions had improved in the autumn of 2020. The Dunn's Road bushfire also directly impacted several landholders in the Tarcutta Valley, forcing them to abandon their on-ground works.



Key facts

- 750 locally endemic seedlings planted
- 50 existing trees protected
- 4 factsheets produced highlighting the importance of paddock trees for the SW slopes landscape

Project Partners



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