

Day 12 Activity

Tales of the Todd Role Profiles

Role #7 Landowner – Hobby Farm Block

You have inherited a block of land along the Todd River from your parents, and enjoy the lifestyle of a few hectares of bush. You have no plans to leave Alice Springs. You and your neighbours have banded together to form a landcare group to pool resources and share experience, ideas and labour.

Background

Not all landowners are environmentalists, but a considerable number of people who enjoy a semi-rural lifestyle close to town care about the health of the bush as well as the effect they themselves have on the ecology of the area.

Some rural blocks have been degraded or badly managed over a long period of time for a range of reasons - they may have been overgrazed or cleared or allowed to become weed infested or burnt out. People who take over such blocks have to carefully consider what management is needed to overcome these problems.

Effects on the River systems

As well as historical problems, block owners can contribute to these by using their blocks irresponsibly.

Concerns

With population growth in places like central Australia, better management is needed to make sure the activities of everyone that lives here don't impact on the river system. It is people who have allowed the escape of introduced plants such as buffel and couch along the banks, and this in turn is crowding out the native grasses as well as causing a fire hazard. It is houses being built right along the natural river pathway that have affected the flow and natural processes of the river. There has been overgrazing in places as well as over watering in town areas, resulting in salt and erosion problems. Off road drivers also cause erosion and general land degradation.

State and federal agencies don't have enough person-power or money to be as effective as they would like to be. So they need the help of citizen watchdogs. But it is not easy for citizen volunteers to gain the expertise needed as they often have full time jobs. Also, many people only come to Alice Springs for a short while and there is a high turnover of landcare volunteers. As a result monitoring of the river system is not as good as it should be, or projects get started but are not completed. More citizens must work with state and federal agencies to ensure better protection of the system.





Role #8 Landowners – Riverfront Blocks

You have lived along the riverbank for many years in a house that is far enough away from the river to avoid flooding when the river runs, but close enough to enjoy the opportunities for bushwalking and wildlife study offered by the desert river habitat.

Background

In the early days of settlement in Alice Springs, many of the first blocks to be settled were those along the river bank. This was because it was a good place to access underground water and many wells were dug and gardens planted. As the town has developed, many of the old houses have been demolished and new blocks of flats and motels have sprung up in their place. As you get further out of town, however, some of these old houses still remain.

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Illegal campers in the Todd also cause some problems by cutting down or burning trees which are provide not only attractive surroundings but are valuable animal habitats. They also leave rubbish around which pollutes the immediate area and can also be carried downstream during flood events.

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Role #9 Commercial Recreation - Tour Operators

You are a camel trek operator, using the dry sandy bed of the Todd River as a route for both long and short camel rides from your farm. Your property backs onto the river.

Background

The Todd River has long been a popular pathway for travellers. Aboriginal people knew that they were likely to find water and food along or near river beds, even if they are mostly dry. Explorers also mapped the country using rivers as defining features, and many white settlers followed these maps and built their homesteads near river beds or semi-permanent waterholes where, as well as water, there were good supplies of tall trees for shade and timber. The features of river beds that attracted all these people still attracts travellers, amongst them being tour operators. These include camping tours that use the river beds as evening campsites as well as trek organisers who take camel and sometimes horse treks along the river beds.

Recreation is important for mental and physical health, as well as helping the economy. It requires buying equipment and supplies, and brings tourist dollars to the community as well. Tour operators employ others such as cooks and guides.

Effects on the River system

Tourists usually come to places like central Australia to see pristine wilderness and the beauty of the River Red Gums and rocky outcrops along desert river beds can be very pleasing. Groups of people camping or otherwise travelling along the river bed can cause an impact if they do things like leave rubbish, cause pollution with detergents or sunscreen in waterholes, introduce weeds by bringing in seeds on car tyres or footwear, cause fires or chop down trees, or create other land degradation by careless use of the country. There is an old saying that goes 'take only photos, leave only footprints'.

People whose properties are right on the verges of the river bed can affect the river by polluting it with irresponsible waste disposal. They can also contribute to bushfires if they are not careful with keeping excess vegetation mowed down.

Concerns

Many popular sites along all the central Australian river beds have been taken over by government agencies such as Parks and Wildlife to manage. This has its advantages and disadvantages - because it is managed and has services provided, it sometimes makes such sites overcrowded. However if too many people try to use places that are not managed, there is potential for them to destroy the very thing people come for - beauty and isolation.

Some people use the river bed as permanent or semi-permanent camp sites, especially close to town, and this can affect the attractiveness of the river for tours.

People also use the river beds as sites to dump rubbish, which then gets re-distributed when the river flows.

You don't want too much regulation which costs tour operators money and deters them from using the river bed, but you need to make sure people do the right thing to keep the area beautiful as well.

