

# Willow Destruction Along Our Streams: Landcare or Land Abuse?

Large willow destruction programs along rivers and streams are mostly funded by Federal grants on the assumption that there is community support (usually via local Landcare groups) and that environmental values will be improved.

In Victoria, Catchment Management Authorities are generally the agencies organising and directing these projects

Often volunteer Landcare groups are involved in the more labour intensive follow up revegetation work after professional earthmoving and herbicide contractors destroy the willows.

Willow destruction costs tens of thousands of dollars per km and requires extensive use of heavy machinery, burning and herbicide.

The willow corridor forests along our streams come from plantings over the last one hundred years (for erosion control and drought fodder for livestock). They stabilised the degraded barren streams left after the gold rush and provide many values for people and nature.

## **For example**

- The dense shade of the willows controls blackberry growth without the need for herbicide, burning or livestock. They also reduce fire hazard and need for fuel reduction burning.
- The unique root mats of willow trees have been proven to capture 40 times more sediment and 10 times more phosphorous than eucalypt trees in our local streams. In other words they are perfect for filtering urban storm water and runoff from agricultural land.
- Management of willows for livestock fodder can improve their water filtering functions, reduce risk of flood damage, allow more regeneration of native vegetation and increased diversity of aquatic life.

Much of this knowledge comes from observation, management experience and scientific study by local community members. High profile environmentalist and co-ordinator of the permaculture concept David Holmgren has promoted this sensible management alternative for over 20 years but the authorities continue to direct funding to willow destruction and fail to show any interest in the alternatives.

The willow destruction programs proceed without any independent environmental impact evaluation and without significant monitoring or evaluation of the results. If forest logging contractors were to disturb stream banks in this way, they would be banned from the forest.

Decay of poisoned willow root mats releases tonnes of sediment (and phosphorus) back into the streams. The burning of the vast debris piles releases more soluble ash minerals for washing into the water (and copious greenhouse gases)

Revegetation with native trees and shrubs is very inefficient at capturing the nutrients released by the destruction of the willows. Lush growth of annual weeds, brambles, gorse and broom encourages more lashings of herbicide.

These revegetation programs are based on assumption that a native ecosystem has been re-established and that this requires less management than willows. As these dense stands of native trees mature they can become a management and fire hazard nightmare requiring fuel reduction burning, herbicide and grazing which all adversely effect water quality.

## **What you can do.**

- Visit a local willow forest near you to see if it still exists, get to know and understand it. Show it to your children. Save it from destruction.
- Join your local landcare group and ask questions. These programs require at least notional community support. It is harder for the bureaucrats to get the money for projects that are disputed.
- If you own water frontage land, refuse offers of money for willow removal, request funding for alternative willow management options.
- Write to your Federal, State and Local government representatives about waste of taxpayers money
- Visit David Holmgren's website to find out more information about permaculture and values of naturalised vegetation and its management. [www.holmgren.com.au](http://www.holmgren.com.au).