

Umbagog Landcare Group
caring for the Blue Devil Grassland.



Our disappearing native grasslands.

At the time of European settlement in the ACT Region it is estimated that we had 10,000 hectares of lowland native grassland. Today, only 800 hectares or 8% remain.

Members of the Umbagog Landcare Group are working towards the conservation and management of 2 hectares of threatened remnant secondary lowland grassland adjacent to Umbagog District Park, Latham ACT. The Blue Devil Grassland is dominated by Kangaroo Grass Themeda triandra and contains a high frequency of native grass species and some native forbs and graminoids eg Blue Devil or Eryngium rostratum. The grassland's urban remnant characteristics give it high local value.

The aim of the group in relation to the grassland are formally expressed as:

- The draft Management Plan objective "To conserve, regenerate and increase the cover of native vegetation within the Park." The strategy identified for this objective is the "Conservation of remnant native vegetation".

Actions taken to meet this objective have included:

- Establishment of a Grasslands Committee to coordinate and plan activities associated with the grassland.
- Participation in the 'Long-term monitoring program of lowland native grassland sites in the ACT' with the Wildlife Research Unit (WRU) of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. The WRU and group members will monitor the grassland in December/January of each year, for 4 years. The first monitoring was conducted in January 1995 and has been supplemented by 3 monitorings performed in Autumn, Winter and Spring on the initiative of group members. Participation in this program contributes to raising the profile of the grassland both with Local Government and with the scientific community. It also contributes to the information known about the grassland eg it has already added to the species list compiled in a survey of the flora and fauna of the Park conducted by Alison Rowell in 1992 -1993. Factors considered include: changes in density, cover or growth of significant species and the proportion of exotics. The monitoring program is an integral part of the recovery plan for relict lowland grasslands and aims to monitor changes in vegetation composition, cover and structure. Over time, the program will provide information about management practices for native grasslands.
- Continuing to lobby the ACT Government to gazette the grassland (Section 129) as part of the Park to protect it from urban development.

- Successful application for Landcare funding and the provision of a training course and field work in plant species identification conducted by botanist Alison Rowell. The "What plant is that? Course" commenced on 18 October 1995 and is being attended by members of six northside landcare groups and members of Friends of Grasslands. The aim of the course is to provide participants with the "opportunity to develop basic plant identification skills to assist them in the monitoring, management and protection of our disappearing native grasslands".
- Establishment of a reference herbarium under the supervision of Sarah Sharp of the Wildlife Research Unit. This herbarium is supplemented by colour photographs of plant species and is planned for use with the local community eg schools, scout and guide groups in planned grassland educational activities.
- Participation of members in the Friends of Grasslands Group and field day activities with the aim of increasing their knowledge of native lowland grasslands and management techniques and to raise the profile of the Umbagog Park grassland.
- Production and dissemination of a Newsletter to interested local residents with articles devoted to the grassland and grassland species designed to raise community interest and knowledge. eg Issue No 2, July 1995 Page 6 "Kangaroo Grass".
- Organisation of clean-up days to remove rubbish from the grassland.
- Depiction of grassland herbs and flowers in murals on Bus Shelters within the vicinity of the Park. This is designed to attract interest in native grassland species, including a map to enable residents to locate and visit the grassland.

Future actions:

- Provision of signage to increase the profile of the grassland.
- Production of a leaflet to increase knowledge on grassland species.
- Distribution of available information on aggressive garden and weed species to nearby residents.
- Development of an education program for Belconnen residents to encourage broader community support and interest in our disappearing remnant native grasslands.

Summary.

Urban development in the ACT has generally followed the strategy of preserving the hills and ridges while the flatter low-lying land has been targeted for development. It is critical that steps are taken to preserve the remaining 800 hectares and that we learn more about the management of these grassland ecosystems. The Umbagog Landcare group believes it has taken an innovative approach in integrating nature conservation objectives with the Landcare Program.