

# newsletter



**GASCOYNE**  
CATCHMENTS PROJECT

Developing an ecologically sustainable,  
profitable and respected pastoral industry

Issue 2.

NOVEMBER 2008



Gascoyne representation at  
Wambiana



Looking at the stocking rate  
trials on Wambiana Station



Presenting the poster at the  
Rangelands Conference

**Welcome to the second edition of the Gascoyne Catchments Project quarterly newsletter.**

The Gascoyne Catchments Project is funded by the Rangelands Coordinating Group. This project was developed by the pastoral industry to help contribute to “the development of an ecologically sustainable, profitable and respected pastoral industry that supports an adaptable and vibrant community”. It builds on the work of regional LCDC groups and is also a stepping stone for more innovative projects in the Gascoyne region. This newsletter follows on from the June edition and gives an update on what the project has achieved since then.

## The Conference

The 15th Biennial Australian Rangelands Society Conference was held at Charters Towers, QLD on the 29th September for four days. The Gascoyne Catchments Project sent four industry and steering committee representatives to present a poster on the project. These gatherings are important opportunities for rangeland managers to share ideas.

Hamish McTaggart (Bidgemia Station), Marty Horak (Warroora Station), Jodie Caunt (Mooloo Downs) and Alex Harper (Dust Up Projects) were sent over to do some serious networking with other industry representatives, rangeland scientists, and Government agencies.

The conference consisted of a mix of field trips and scientific presentations. Poster presentations were held on the 3rd day of the conference and many interested parties came to see what we had to say about our region and our project. There was some stimulating conversation about the future of the project, our objectives and the development of the monitoring and self assessment

tool. Overall the delegates went home with their questions answered and piece of mind that the Gascoyne is in good hands.

All papers were interesting and provided an insight into the different levels of thinking and the range of research that is being conducted in the Rangelands. If you would like a copy of the conference proceedings please contact Alex Harper.

The final day involved a summation of the conference and Kaz Johnson from ESRM was one of the three delegates asked to present a 5 minute round up of the week's events. Kaz in her typical enthusiastic spirit presented a poem. The poem gave an overall description of the entire conference and ended on this very relevant note:

So, as we depart, we'll each take a  
token  
With memories and notes of what  
has been spoken.  
Armed with a passion and equipped  
with new names,  
We'll take to our Rangelands on the  
new winds of change.



# Rangelands Self Assessment and Reporting Tool – “The Monitoring Tool”

The Monitoring Tool has developed progressively with a set of clear outcomes produced at the July Steering Committee meeting. The Monitoring Tool has two clear objectives;

1. Pasture Monitoring Site reassessment for property and regional scope of pasture change in the last 30 years
2. Identification of Alternative Monitoring Systems that will provide the GCP with a more robust monitoring tool addressing all aspects of range condition and pastoral productivity.



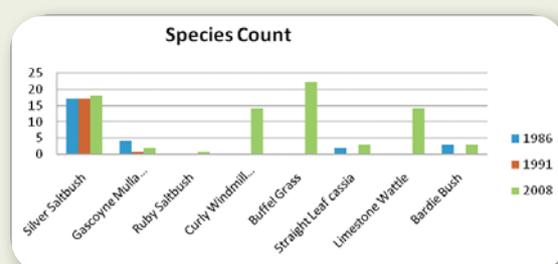
## Pasture Monitoring Sites (PMS)

Pasture Monitoring Sites were established by the Department of Agriculture in the early 80's on the basis that they were reasonably representative of the condition of the most important pasture type within a paddock or part of the station. The sites were set up throughout the whole Gascoyne region and reassessed at intervals of 5-6 years. In 1992 the Department of Agriculture discontinued the assessment of PMS and turned their attention to Western Australian Rangeland Monitoring Sites (WARMS) which provided a more regional scope of range condition. The last time sites were formally reassessed was in 1997/98 by private contract as a landholder initiative. It was therefore decided at the July Steering Committee meeting that the reassessment of PMS throughout the district needed to be recommenced. Given the criteria for PMS site selection, they provide priceless data on the change that has occurred to valuable perennial species throughout the Gascoyne Rangelands in the last 30 years.

The GCP's Rangelands Self Assessment and Reporting Coordinator Jodie Caunt from Mooloo Downs will be coordinating and completing the

reassessment of the PMS's. As time and resource constraints will limit every PMS per property being reassessed, it was therefore decided that one PMS would be reassessed per land system per property. As land systems are consistent throughout the southern rangelands we hope to achieve two things through this reassessment; one an individual property file of PMS over the range of land systems and two a regional file of perennial species records throughout the regions land systems (appropriate to management units sheep/cattle). The reassessment and compilation of the PMS data will serve as a foundation for the Monitoring Tool on which we will integrate specified rangeland and production components.

Below is one example of how historic PMS data will be presented to illustrate change in pasture condition (data from one site over 22 years).



# Alternative Monitoring Systems

Although PMS provide valuable data regarding pasture condition they are somewhat limited to indicating change in other components of the landscape health such as soil condition. Identification and trials of alternative monitoring procedures that provide this information have been established.

In July Jodie and Wooramel station pastoralist Justin Steadman attended a three day training course on Landscape Function Analysis (LFA) directed by internationally recognised CSIRO Ecologist David Tongway. LFA is concerned with soil health and productivity and will indicate trends in soil stability, infiltration and nutrient cycling status within two months of the initial site assessment. LFA's core principles of Soil Surface Assessment and landscape function were presented to the Steering Committee and four LFA trials have been established throughout the project area to assess the user friendliness of LFA. Tongway has shown a great interest in the Gascoyne Catchments Project and will be visiting the project area early next year. It is hoped that components of LFA will be incorporated into the final Monitoring Tool.

More recently Jodie and pastoralists Hamish McTaggart and Marty Horak attended a workshop on "Stocktake" directed by Col Paton (Grazing Land Management – MLA) at Ellimeek Station, Qld. Stocktake is a Queensland based monitoring system that addresses a variety of rangeland components that contribute to the production system such as soil condition, forage budgeting, vegetation abundance, palatability and health. The principles of Stocktake will be presented at the next Steering Committee meeting and appropriate elements of the system incorporated into the Monitoring Tool thereafter.

The Monitoring Tool continues to evolve into a robust device as we become aware of alternative systems and the information they can provide us with. The following nine months will present us with adequate time to explore, learn, trial and integrate many more monitoring avenues so to develop ours into a truly specified tool for the Gascoyne area.



## events

### 30th October 2008

Rob Richards' interviews with retired pastoral managers,  
Location: Perth

### 14th November 2008

Steering Committee Meeting  
Location: Lotteries House,  
Carnarvon. Time: 9.30am

**Think you are a catchment wizard...try out the website**

[www.catchmentdetox.net.au](http://www.catchmentdetox.net.au)



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