



Mitchell River Review

December 2005

Inside this issue:

Fire project update	2
Weedbuster week in Irvinebank	3
Bar Barrum cross cultural workshop	3
Working with Cape York	3
What's happening around the catchment	4

Bellyache bush update –trial spraying

In our last Mitchell Review we talked about the massive problem posed by bellyache bush (*Jatropha gossypifolia*). These infestations are unique, nowhere else in Queensland does bellyache bush grow only within the high banks of the river. This situation poses many challenges as it means the plant is very quickly spread when the river is in flood, it also means the plant has the best conditions for growing (this is why it can flower and seed all year round). It also means it is very difficult terrain to get in there and do the work. In mid November we did a



The low, dark plant within the river bank is Bellyache bush on the Palmer River.

and Fiona from the Mitchell Group. Apart from providing advice on the process, the research staff were involved to gather information to get off-label registration for the herbicides. Currently,

to use these sprays requires a huge amount of paperwork (not to mention lots of money!). We also put in a joint submission for funding under the Defeating Weed Menace Program. We will continue to keep you informed as the project progresses. We will be really chasing this issue as bellyache bush spreads for more than 81km on the Palmer River.

trial aerial spray on the Palmer River and we will be respraying in April. The project involved four Tropical Weed Research Centre staff, Russell Graham and Trevor Meldrum from Cape York Weeds and Feral staff, Wendy Seabrook from Peninsula Pastoralist Landcare Committee, Leon Kingsley and Margo from Mt Mulgrave and Deb

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Aerial spraying starts at the upstream extent

For your information:

- **Envirofund** - Round 8 will open for applications in February 2006. Community groups and individuals can apply for grants of up to \$50,000 (GST inclusive) to undertake local projects aimed at conserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable resource use.
- **Wild Rivers**—want to know more about this legislation and what the nomination means, how to make a submission? Go to : www.nrm.qld.gov.au/wildrivers
- **Are you in the 'shared' Mitchell area?** Did you know that Peninsula Pastoralists Landcare Committee also have funding for computer training, Grazing Land Management, and land rehabilitation projects
- **JAMMARR Nursery** - Congratulations to JAMMARR who have received funding from Northern Gulf and Gambling Community Benefit Fund to build a nursery in Mt Molloy –well done Rupert & Juliana !

Rivers – health check for the lifeblood of our landscape

Rivers and streams are the lifeblood of any region, and the quality and diversity of life is dependent on their health. Waterways are only as healthy as their catchments, and the upland Mitchell River catchment lies in an area of high population pressure and

agricultural activity. One way to assess and monitor the health status of the catchment is through a water quality analysis, so Damien Burrows from the Australian Centre for Tropical Research will conduct some assessments. We know people are con-

cerned about possible impacts from some of the old mines so that is one impact that will be tested for. Damien will also be seeking local feedback to link his research to current community concerns, so that answers to the most pressing questions can be addressed.

Fire Project Update — Peter Thompson, Coordinator Fire Project

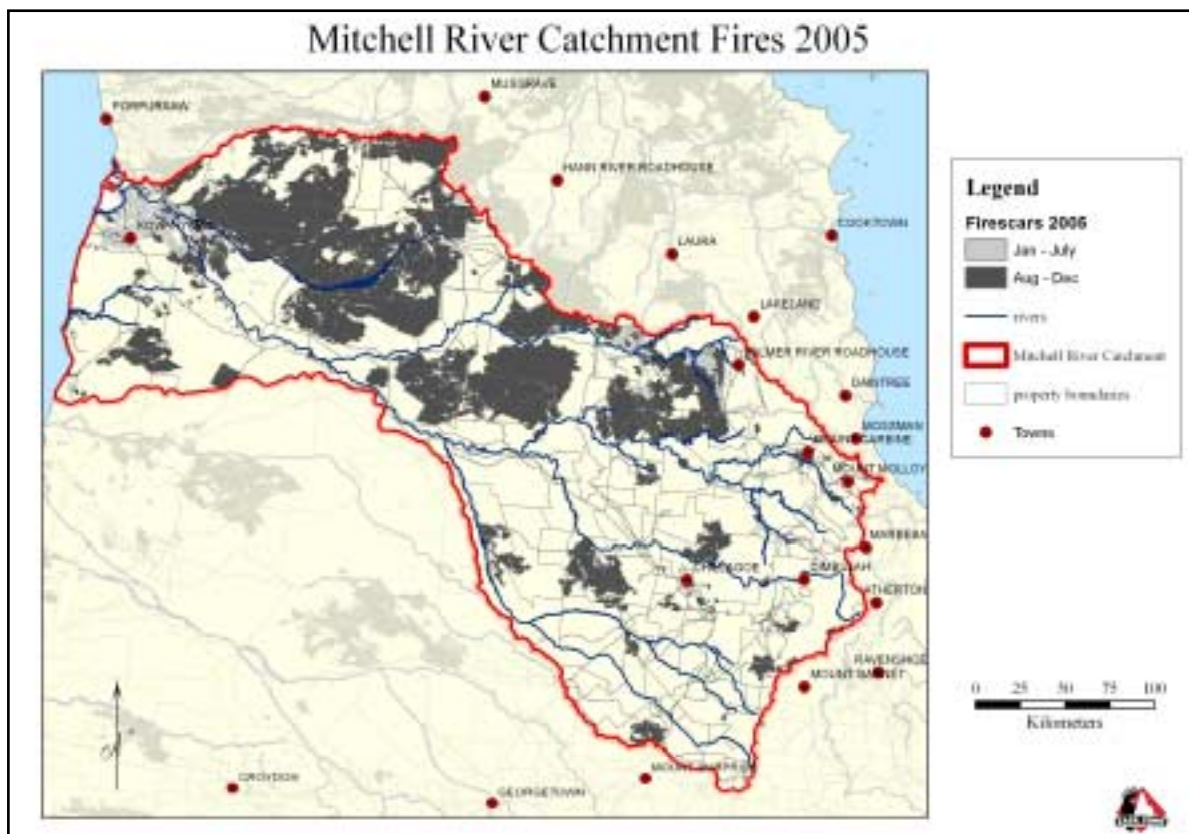
The 2005 fire season is almost over but a week before Christmas it is still hot and dry and there are many big fires burning. Predictions that we would have a difficult year have been borne out. The map below shows fires have occurred over large areas, most notable have been extensive fires in the middle reaches of the catchment, particularly north of the Mitchell River itself. Proactive burning was limited because land managers were justifiably worried about the potential severity of the 2005 season and what could happen to the limited feed available. Maitland Downs did an early season aerial burning program and this proved effective in halting September fires.

Quite a few people have commented that they thought there was a decline in the sensitivity of hotspots in detecting fires. While it is true that ageing

satellites have been withdrawn from service, replacements have generally maintained or improved the effectiveness and reliability of the information over time and this can be seen when we compare the records. What **has** changed is the level of use and the community expectation that all fires will be detected and that the information will always be available. There are many reasons why the current satellite system misses some of the fires that do occur, including cloud cover and exactly when the satellite passes over (you can find an explanation of some of these reasons on the fire website under "Help – Background" in the main menu). However the Fire Project has survived funding difficulties and continues to provide the only available mechanism to monitor fire activity across the large areas of North Queensland and provide detailed ongoing mapping of burnt areas to assist in

improving land management practices. As an example approximately 20,000 hotspots were recorded in the Mitchell Catchment in 2005 with 1000 recorded in one week in December.

Next year the fire program will be expanding activity to include the purchasing of Aster satellite imagery to assist in the development of property scale mapping and working closely with the DPI Grazing Land Management Project and landowners in developing sustainable management practices. We are also hoping to develop a network of interested people to provide better access to timely information to their neighbours/local community. It is expected that these keen people would receive a small annual contract payment as well as appropriate training so that your community has resources at its finger tips.



Weedbuster week in Irvinebank

For most people weeds are nothing short of hard work, but activities organised during Weedbuster week, in the second week of October, help get the message out there that weeds are everyone's problem.

Weedbuster week is a national program that aims to raise awareness and increase public understanding about the problems weeds cause.

The students of Irvinebank school showed their enthusiasm tackling environmental issues when Andrew

Congoo (NR&M Land Protection Officer) visited the school to talk about weeds. Andrew and the kids (along with their teacher Belinda and Donna from Irvinebank Landcare) walked around the school grounds and identified what weeds are there. Using this information, they will develop a plan to address the weed issues. One of the school's worst weed problems is Mother of Millions.

Well done Irvinebank, it is activities like this that foster community ownership of problems.



Andrew Congoo from Natural Resources and Mines talks to the students about costs and other impacts of weeds.

Community Awareness grant—Bar Barrum cross cultural workshop

More exciting news for the Bar Barrum community at Emuford. Not only have they received funding from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) to buy a second water tank, but they have also received funding from the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. This \$2500 Community Awareness grant is one of only 21 in Queensland. So well done to the Bar Barrum mob.

This grant will be used to run a cross-cultural workshop in May that will

combine Indigenous traditional knowledge with science to help get Aboriginal youth back on country.

The program will provide an exchange of knowledge on natural resource management including issues such as fire management and biodiversity. In October several community members completed a tourism course and the May workshop will also provide young people with skills to support a cultural tourism venture on Bar Barrum country.



Tourism course graduates- include Lily Max and Rob and course teacher Marcy front (L)

Working with Cape York

In early December we had a meeting with the groups involved in the 'shared' area of the Mitchell Catchment. What the 'shared' area really means is that people who live on the north side of the Mitchell River have the opportunity to access project funding across both Cape York and

Northern Gulf natural resource management regions. At this meeting it was decided that to make it easier for people who live in this area, that the Mitchell River Group would be a first point of contact. So if you have an idea or a project you would like to do but aren't sure what to do next give

us a call and we will help you with some ideas and information and what to do next so you can get your project happening. (N.B. PPLC provided some money towards the Palmer bellyache project and Dept of Communities have also provided some funds for catchment management services)

MITCHELL RIVER WATERSHED MANAGEMENT GROUP INC NEWSLETTER

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Sustainable Management of the Mitchell Catchment.

Next Mitchell meeting:

January 25 9.30am—2.30pm Dimbulah Bowls Club, Dimbulah

Come along and have your say about management in the Mitchell catchment, raise your issues, find out about funding and hear about ;
Tilapia –Stirling Peverell will tell us how to identify a tilapia, what to do and who to contact if you have caught one.

Wild Rivers– Robin Clark, NR&M Wild River Coordinator will tell us what this legislation really means.

**For more information and project updates
Check out our website : www.mitchell-river.com.au**

What's happening around the catchment

- **Mitchell River Water Resource Plan**

The planning is progressing well. There have been three community reference panel (CRP) meetings held and there will be a fourth meeting in Mareeba in March. This meeting will be the opportunity for the CRP to review and provide comment on the Draft Water Resource Plan.

Want to find out more, go to:
www.nrm.qld.gov.au/wrp/mitchell

- **Mining**

As commodity prices increase and methods for extracting minerals become more efficient there is often an increase in the level of mining activity and we are seeing this happen at the moment around the Mitchell catchment. Many of you will be aware that the Alice River gold mine is really picking up and you may have seen the semi trailers carting gear in there as the mine and accommodation is being re-established.

Wolfram Camp is another site where there is a lot of activity happening. The company has been doing a lot of drilling to establish how much molybdenum and wolfram is still available and exactly where it can be found.

Republic Gold has been doing exploratory work around Northcote and Tregoorra for some months to work out how much gold they can recover using a process called heap leaching.

There is a useful website where you can find out more about mining leases and tenure, go to:
www.webgis.nrm.qld.gov.au/webgis/webqmin

- **Gully Erosion and Riparian Condition**

There are many projects happening that will increase our understanding of the processes affecting the waterways. Andrew Brooks from Griffith University will use satellite photos for mapping and classifying areas of gully erosion. This project will study the Mitchell and Coleman Rivers (and three others outside the region) and will help to work out some of the underlying processes that are adding to the erosion, sedimentation causes are not just about land use. Another project will be recording information about the condition of the riparian area (between the high banks) of the rivers. These projects will help provide information for management and record how well rivers are doing over time.

- **Peninsula Pastoralists Landcare Committee (PPLC)**

The PPLC have been very active and have lots happening on the ground. Properties already involved in GLM (\$avannaPlan) include Bamboo, Astrea, Artemis, Strathburn, Strathmay and Kimba, with lots more interested. The computer training is proving very popular. This joint project between Landcare and the Fire Project that provides one-on-one training. If you live on Cape York and would like to be involved call Debbie Gostelow 40951434. PPLC also have funding for a range of land rehabilitation projects. There has been nearly \$300,000 already provided for projects. As part of the building the Landcare Ethic project PPLC will also be purchasing tables and chairs for the Lakeland hall - Landcare has something for everyone !



Joe Rolfe, Michelle & Margie Innes, Anne & Ashleigh Raymond, Clinton Innes & Rodney Raymond inspect pastures on Kimba as part of SavannaPlan