



Shoalhaven Council – the weed warriors



Above: A daunting task awaits these weed warriors.



IF YOU have ever negotiated the picturesque drive through Kangaroo Valley to Nowra, NSW, you may recall the lush, green roadsides (and the odd hairpin bend). At first glance much of the green is an attractive glossy evergreen woody shrub; white flower spikes in the spring and small black fruit by mid-summer. Closer inspection shows it is privet – a ferocious weed.

In South Africa and Mozambique, privet is a bad environmental weed, occupying streambanks across the summer rainfall regions. In NSW, it is widespread in coastal regions from Bega to Queensland, and inland to West Wyalong.

Privet is spread in the droppings of animals that eat the fruit. It thrives in disturbed areas with good soils and high rainfall. The fires in December 2002 opened areas of the south coast up for invasion.

Luckily, the Shoalhaven City

Council rose to the challenge and went to war against privet – spray guns blazing. In March 2002 they launched the Privet Control Strategy employing two part-time privet control officers to inspire and mobilise an army of landowners in Kangaroo Valley, Berry and Milton.

Council wisely sought to work with bushcare and landcare groups who linked them up with landowners who were already active in weed control and bush regeneration. Together they went much further, to the new residents and absentee owners who knew little; to the older residents who had given up, and the larger landowners who were overwhelmed.

Council armed landholders with technical advice on control techniques and organised a cavalry of volunteer bush regenerators, using cut and paint methods, to assist.

As the project progressed chain-saws, spray programs and contrac-



PRIVET A PROBLEM?

tors were also enlisted. Since 2002, more than 160 landowners and 130 volunteers from Work for the Dole, Green Corps, Conservation Volunteers Australia, and Landcare and Bushcare groups have joined the cause.

Removing the privet was only one part of the program. Natural regeneration has proved very successful in replacing privet on many sites. In addition, 4500 native trees and grasses were planted in winter 2004 to replace privet on more than 20 sites. Other sites have returned to grazing, or to mowing as the weed control regime.

More than 4700 volunteer hours later and things are looking up. The enemy is retreating and residents knowledge and understanding of weed control and bush regeneration methods is at an all-time high. It is estimated that more than 90per cent of landowners involved have continued privet control and are also targeting other environmental weeds.

With the strong support of their council, which gained funding from the NSW Environment Trust, landholders have forged ahead and tackled this weed.

Make no mistake – this is hard work. One father-and-son team worked two sessions a day (morning and night) for two months to clear two kilometres of thick riverside privet from their beef farm.

Shoalhaven City Council has significantly increased its commitment of resources to privet control on its own land. Council made privet control on its own land (commercial properties, recreational reserves, roadsides and bushland) a high priority. This has encouraged the Sydney Catchment Authority and the Recreational Fishing Trust to fund complementary projects in the northern Shoalhaven area.

As an incentive to private landowners to improve environmental management of remnant bushland, the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority is now funding a follow-up program, to continue the privet control strategy.

This battle is not over. Significant recognition and praise are due to landowners and all volunteers for their commitment of energy and enthusiasm; in particular, in believing that the complete control of privet in their local area was an achievable goal.



A wall of Privet on Kangaroo Valley Road.



A privet infestation in local bush land.

The extent of privet distribution has been significantly reduced. Full control across the Shoalhaven local government area during the next two years now appears achievable.

Take a drive through Kangaroo Valley now and a wide array of bare upright sticks sprout among the greenery, testimony to the effective-

ness of woody weed herbicides and community effort.

If privet is a problem in your shire, Shoalhaven City Council is happy to share its considerable knowledge and expertise to help you win your war. 🇺🇸

Contact: Greg Thompson, phone 0431 133 000, or email <thompson@g@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au>.

Photographs by Greg Thompson