

The stats add up: bush regen gives the best value

Rymill Abell

In 2005 I published some statistics demonstrating the cost effectiveness of bush regeneration and the importance of good project management. Four years on, a review of the work hours for the site showed that maintenance requirements were even lower than predicted.

The article *Bush Regeneration of Paddy Pallin Reserve A comment on the importance of reliability and flexibility of funding to deliver ecological outcomes*. Featured in the journal *Ecological Restoration & Management* Vol. No 2 August 2005.

EMR Editor Tein McDonald explains "The article showed that there was a reducing level of regeneration inputs needed at the site, giving weight to the proposition that more sensitive maintenance of bushland well might cost council no more than traditional expenditure on 'park maintenance'. It seems that no-one had formally tested that—comparing regen costs with council inputs prior to the regen project starting—until Rymill published this article, drawing on the rigorous records kept by the bush regeneration contractors over the years."

The reserve, in urban Lindfield on Sydney's North Shore, contains a small remnant of the endangered ecological community Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest. Previous management had been inconsistent and at times damaging. Weeds were well established when the project began in 2000. Ehrharta covered most of the site and tradescantia, morning glory, madeira vine, fishbone fern, agapanthus were also extensive.

Secure, consistent funding and well directed bush regeneration turned the situation around. Beginning in 2000, a few years of intense work had the weeds under control, and maintenance requirements were decreasing. In 2005 I predicted 20 hours of skilled bush regeneration each quarter would be necessary to maintain the quality of the bushland.

This was double what reserve manager Ku-ring-gai Council was estimated to have been investing in the previous mowing and spraying maintenance approach. We felt, however, that even if costs are higher, the bush regeneration approach represents a better long term investment as it actually achieves substantial regeneration of a natural asset.

Paddy Pallin Reserve in 2004. After the first four years of consistent bush regeneration the diverse grassy understorey, typical of Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest, is almost weed free.

New figures

We have now updated the figures to include the hours for the last 4 years, and found that the reduction in required maintenance has been sharper than predicted. It would seem that my prediction of 20 hours of skilled bush regeneration each quarter being necessary to maintain the quality of the bushland, was more than has been found to be necessary. The actual figure as determined over the past four years is close to 9 hours each quarter. As estimated in the original note, this is the same amount of time for the Council employees' previous quarterly involvement in working in that bushland area. Thus the original case of bush regeneration being a superior long-term investment for the maintenance of urban bushland has, in this situation, been verified.

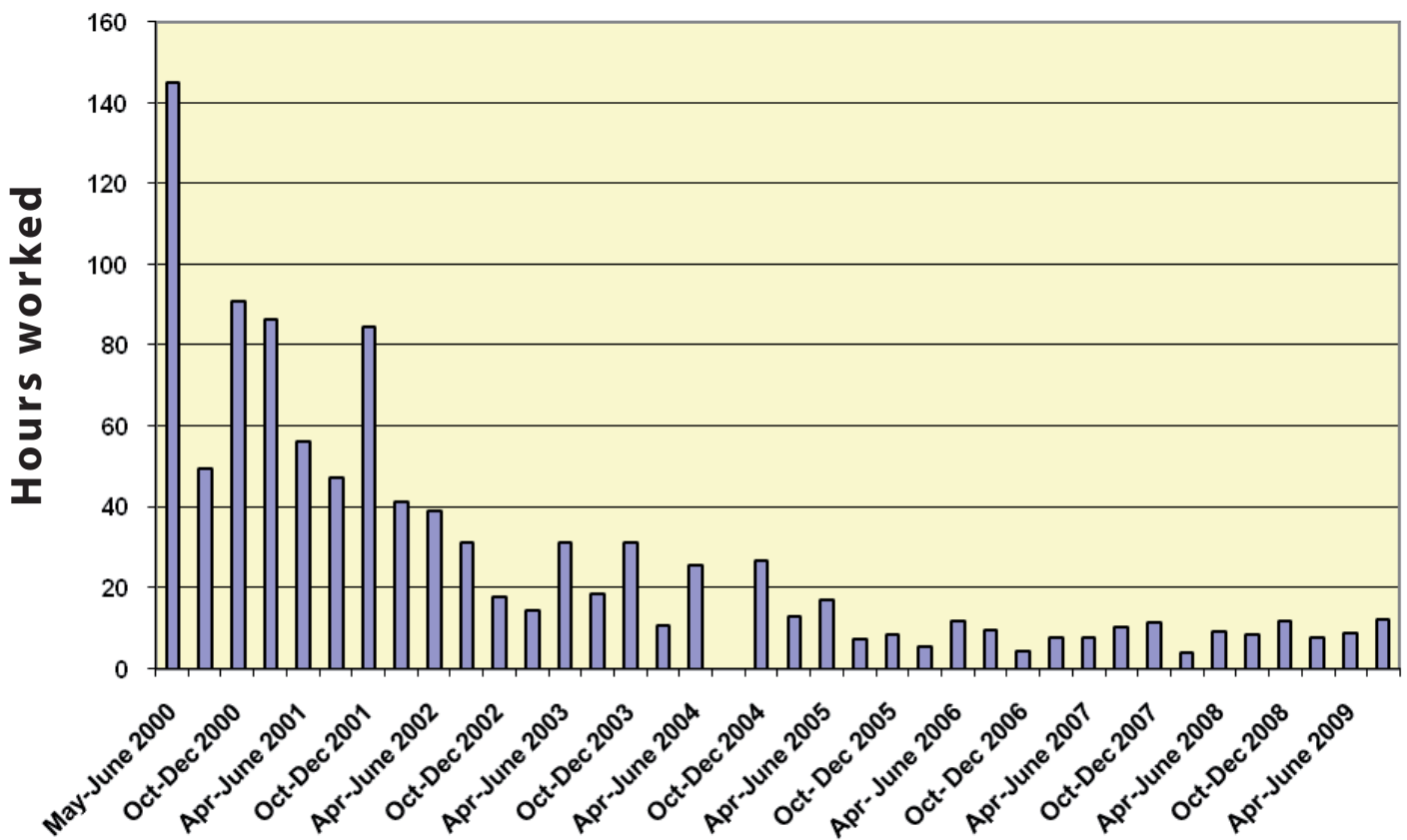
Paddy Pallin Reserve bushland area has continued to receive bush regeneration by the same contractors mentioned in the early EMR article (the Lane Cove Bush Regenerators Cooperative Ltd). Due to receiving regular bush regeneration maintenance and the current good season, the reserve is, at this time, in excellent condition. Maintenance efforts are scheduled for about 9 visits each year with decisions as to timing being affected by consideration of the weather and seasonal variations

A major factor in the good results achieved in Paddy Pallin Reserve is the respect and trust between the contractor and the corporate sponsor funding the work (Paddy Pallin Pty Ltd, whose founder was commemorated when the reserve was dedicated in 1985, now the Paddy Pallin Foundation). Work has been done at appropriate times when natural events or changing seasons have given rise to the need to deal with particular problems.

The updated results show that, after the restoration phase, bush regen-type maintenance dropped to a level that is equal to the 'maintenance' that council carried out prior to restoration. (i.e. that was the main factor degrading the site in the first place: council's mowing, whipper snipping and spraying of edges etc.)

This adds further weight to the idea that, if you retain the bushland and maintain it as a bush regen site, you may well avoid the need for a more costly restoration phase. Even more importantly, however, it provides some strong figures to counter the argument that traditional park maintenance is necessary because Councils don't have the funds to maintain bushland to a high standard.

I am grateful for access to the good record keeping of Fay Fennell, the supervisor who has overseen the bush regeneration being done in Paddy Pallin Reserve and the bushland south of Highfield Road.



Paddy Pallin Reserve, Lindfield

From the Paddy Pallin Foundation Website

Paddy Pallin Reserve was named after Paddy Pallin by the then Mayor Ron Yeates, a keen bushwalker. Paddy Pallin Reserve was previously partly a drainage easement and partly land owned by Lindfield Laundry and was opened on 27th July 1985. The upper part of the Reserve is a formal park with barbecue facilities and a children's play area and open grass. The majority of the Reserve was weed infested bushland.

This small reserve in the catchment of Little Blue Gum Creek, had a volunteer bush regeneration group start in the 1990s. This group is still going and is doing an excellent job on a part of the reserve near Polding Road.

In April 2000 it was decided that to regenerate the whole reserve would need a professional team. The Paddy Pallin Foundation employed the Lane Cove Bush Regenerators Cooperative Ltd to carry out this work. This work is continuing.

The reserve is responding to this long term project and a large part of the reserve is now nearly weed free. Ku-ring-gai Council has contributed by paying for the removal of some large camphor laurels and other large exotic trees. The Council has also in July 2009 upgraded the track through the lower part of the reserve.

The importance of this project is that there has been consistent funding and a consistent approach to the bush regeneration by using the same contractor.

Consistent funding has been possible because of the commitment of the Paddy Pallin Foundation to this project and to Ku-ring-gai Council supporting the funding to be made direct to the contractor and not having to go through the bureaucracy and the associated delays.

www.paddypallinfoundation.org.au/index.php/current/paddypallinreserve

Secure, ongoing funding for bush regeneration

From Fay Fennell of the Lane Cove Bush Regeneration Co-op

The success of Paddy Pallin Reserve is almost entirely due to secure, ongoing funding. It was only when the Paddy Pallin Foundation stepped in and provided ongoing funding that real progress was made on both north Paddy Pallin Reserve and lower Paddy Pallin Reserve. The previous long delay between contracts was counter productive often resulting in a waste of time and money.

The long association between LCBRC and the Pallins has provided a trusting work association. Their interest and appreciation of the work we do has contributed to the work satisfaction of the team members (one of which is one of the originals and the previous supervisor) and promotes a genuine interest and connection to the site. It is more than a job.

A well thought out work plan, a great team, regular monthly visits, diligent follow up weeding, progressive primary work and the natural resilience of the Reserve did the rest.