**PRESIDENTS REPORT FOR CRPCG AGM, 2020.**

Despite a difficult year, there has been a great deal achieved on Cooleman Ridge during the past 12 months. We started the year with a very dry spring, this was followed by a very active bush-fire season, and although there were no fires on the ridge itself, there were many days that were too hot and smoke-affected to be able to safely work outside.

Luckily the Ridge was not affected by the severe hailstorm which hit central Canberra in January. By February the restrictions caused by the coronavirus started to limit our access to the Ridge. At one stage we were advised by PCS to stop all active weeding on the ridge, even if we were weeding alone. By June these restrictions had been lifted, but we did miss a critical time to reduce the sudden weed-growth after those March/April rains.

1. **Membership.**

The coronavirus restrictions have encouraged many more people to use local open-spaces, and this has opened up the opportunities for more people to join our Ridge group, and has provided us with an increase in our active membership. A few of our monthly meetings have recorded over 15 weeders, and we have had to split up into groups in order to maintain distance from one-another and to access different weeding spots.

1. **Native Plant Growth**

The recent sustained rains have made an enormous difference to the growth on the ridge. Yes, the Patterson’s Curse and the mustard weed are growing well, but the native grasses flourished after the March rains. The red-leg grass covered the hillsides, and there were large patches of Digitaria brownii, which I had thought was a rare plant on the Ridge. Kangaroo grass, nineawn grass, Queensland Bluegrass, sporobolus, barbed wiregrass, joycea, chloris and of course the usual austrostipas, wallaby grasses and poas, all sprang up and flowered. If it had not been for the coronavirus restrictions, we could have easily invited visitors to an informative grasses walk. The dams are now full, and the frogs are obviously very happy.

1. **Management of Invasive Weeds**.

The extension of our monthly weeding cycle to include Lincoln Place in the rotation is prooving to be very successful. This extra spot has enabled us to cover much more of the ridge than previously. With our extra volunteers we may be able to extend to another area, possibly along the western edge behind Darrell Place this coming season. Our weeding meetings involve mostly manual removal methods, although a couple of members use spray-packs in certain areas.

The Friday Morning Group has continued to keep the Kathner Dam area looking fabulous and relatively weed-free. We did sprinkle some local native grass seeds around the dam in late autumn in the hope that this will increase the variety of grasses in this area.

Currently we are investigating the possibility of joining a trial to assess the effectiveness of the trailer steam-weeder which has been purchased by SACTCG. Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) plan to plant a range of native plants near the Old Dam within the next few months, to provide extra and more varied habitat, and we may use the steam-weeder to reduce the weeds in that area before planting begins. We are hoping that the forcast of a wet spring/summer is correct since follow-up watering did not seem to be part of the PCS plan.

**4. Parks and Conservation Service**

Parks and Conservation Service support has been a bit hit-and-miss this year, compounded by the fact that we did not have a dedicated ranger for quite a few months, and all the rangers were very busy with fire-control over many summer months. However, we now have a new ranger, Chris Holder, and things are definitely looking up with his excellent communication. A recent Annual Planning meeting with the rangers in August was very beneficial, and we hope that these meetings continue to be organised each year in late winter instead of late spring so that we can co-ordinate our activities to be more effective over the growth periods.

Contract weed-control companies did some great work with African Lovegrass and woody-weeds over the year. However, the very dry and hot spring of 2019 altered the flowering habit of the St Johns Wort, and the contractors suddently found that it was too late to spray effectively. This was a disappointment as the CRPCG had decided to specially target this weed-species last summer. Hopefully this year the plants will be more predictable in their flowering.

1. **Monitoring**

This has continued in November at the 2 locations on the ridge, one above Darrell Place and the other on the eastern flank of Arawang. Last year Natasha Oates joined Arminel and Linda in monitoring the Darrel Place site.

**Summary.**

My thanks to all the volunteers who are so enthusiastic about keeping the ridge in good condition. A few people have taken special responsibility for certain areas of the ridge, and it’s great to have the extra eyes (and hands) to keep the weeds at bay. Also thanks to all members of the committee who so patiently reply when I send them endless emails about various matters. It is so good to have such a committed and easy-to-work-with team. Special thanks to Rob Lundie (Secretary and newsletter), Rohan Thomas (Website manager and Treasurer), and to Alan Ford, Doug Tinney, Jenny Horsefield, Chris Oates and Brigitte Brickwood for their various assistance, from keeping up the supply of pamphlets in the boxes to supervising weeding groups during work-parties.

We are looking forward to another year of successful weeding on Cooleman Ridge.

Linda Spinaze

20th September, 2020.