

40,000 Trees

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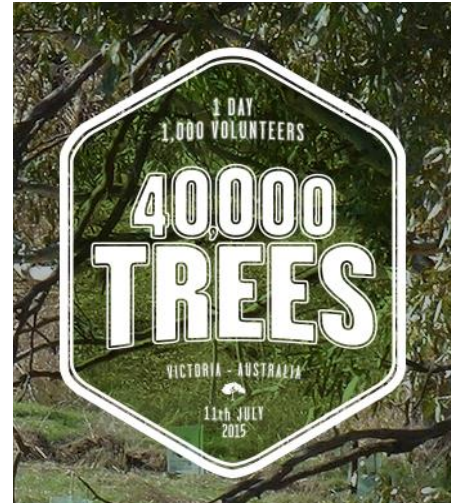
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Introduction

A grand and somewhat crazy project captured the imagination of the Barkers Creek Landcare Network. The aim was to save 40,000 seedlings with only 8 weeks to make it happen.

40,000 seedlings of local provenance to the Mt Alexander area were propagated by Middleton Prison as part of the Victorian Government's 2 Million trees project. Unfortunately, the proposed projects for these plants did not proceed. To ensure the seedlings weren't wasted, the informal Barkers Creek Landcare Network took up the challenge to get them planted.

Very quickly, the Network steering committee; made up of the presidents of Barkers Creek Landcare and Wildlife, Harcourt Valley and North Harcourt/Sedgwick Landcare groups, went to work. Success hinged on a good team, sponsorship, sound organisation, engaging volunteers and very importantly finding land.



Fortunately, the idea also captured the imagination of sponsors, landholders and the general public.

The team engaged an event manager, a social media consultant and a works coordinator and started networking. Connecting Country offered support and the project became feasible. Landholders were approached and the initial response was good. A timetable was developed and the 40000 tree project was launched.

The aim was 1 day and 1000 volunteers to plant 40,000 seedlings across multiple planting sites within an 8km stretch of Harcourt and Harcourt North.

Background

As we are all aware, land clearing over the last two centuries, has significantly altered the local landscape. The removal of trees and shrubs changes water flow, soil structure and nutrient cycling and also removes structural woody habitat. Many woodland birds have suffered significant decline in their numbers and continue to be at risk as a result of this loss of habitat.

A key component to maintaining ecological health starts with revegetation. Planting 40,000 trees and shrubs offered the opportunity to improve habitat and corridors. This could only enhance the survival and prospering of local species of native birds and fauna and hence species diversity.

STATS:

Facebook views: 227669

Facebook likes: 438

Content views: 946335

Total reach: 233918

RADIO & NEWS

Weekly Times - 9 July

Gold FM - 3 July

Maine FM - 1 July

ABC Bendigo - 8 July

Maine FM - 10 July

ABC Radio - 11 July

Bendigo Advertiser

13 July

ABC Bendigo - 13 July

Win TV

WEB MEDIA

ABC Central Victoria

9 July

Bendigo Advertiser

13 July

Victorian National Parks

Association - 24 June

Connecting Country

19 June

Muckleford Landcare

8 July

Victorian Landcare

Gateway - 5 July

Goldfields Track - 11 July

Gold FM Community

Events - 11 July

MASG - 28 June

Only Melbourne - 7 July

NCCMA North Central

Chat July

The Core July

The Core August

Birdlife Australia

Publicity

An extensive effort was made to publicise the event in a very short timeframe. Event information was sent to over 100 newspapers, community groups, media outlets, radio stations, community event listings as well as networking, environmental and volunteer organisations. After a slow start, the offers of publicity increased as momentum around the event built. The response was very positive.

Promotion included The Weekly Times, The Bendigo Advertiser, Gold FM98.3 AM1071, The Core, ABC Radio FM91.1, Maine FM94.9, Win News, blogs, fliers, Facebook and direct emails.

Sponsors

The event could not have taken place without some very supportive sponsors. The event's major funding sponsor was Connecting Country - a *community-operated not-for-profit organisation*. Other sponsors included the City of Greater Bendigo, the Hub Foundation, North Harcourt/Sedgwick Landcare, Harcourt Valley Landcare and Barkers Creek Landcare and Wildlife Group together with donations from some landholders.

Sponsors were thanked on fliers, Facebook, Eventbrite and various web posts.



<http://www.weeklytimesnow.com.au/news/national/volunteers-wanted-to-rescue-40000-tree-seedlings-from-middleton-prison/story-fnkfnspy-1227433657978>

<http://www.bendigoadvertiser.com.au/story/3206766/prison-grown-trees-spared-the-axe/?cs=80>

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2015/07/08/4269909.htm>

<https://www.facebook.com/40000Trees>

http://www.goldfieldstrack.com.au/Pages/Events/179-40_000_Trees.aspx

<http://www.goldcentralvictoria.com.au/your-community/community-home/event/2679-40-000-trees-reforestation-project>

<http://vnpa.org.au/page/publications/nature-news-hub/40,000-trees,-1000-volunteers,-3-hours>

<https://soundcloud.com/grantbroadcasters/40000-trees-needs-volunteers>

[www.facebook.com/](http://www.facebook.com/40000trees)

40000trees

Landholders

A letterbox drop, emails and personal contact were used to engage landholders within the designated area to participate in the project. The response was very positive.

Landholders were asked to propose potential planting sites that were:

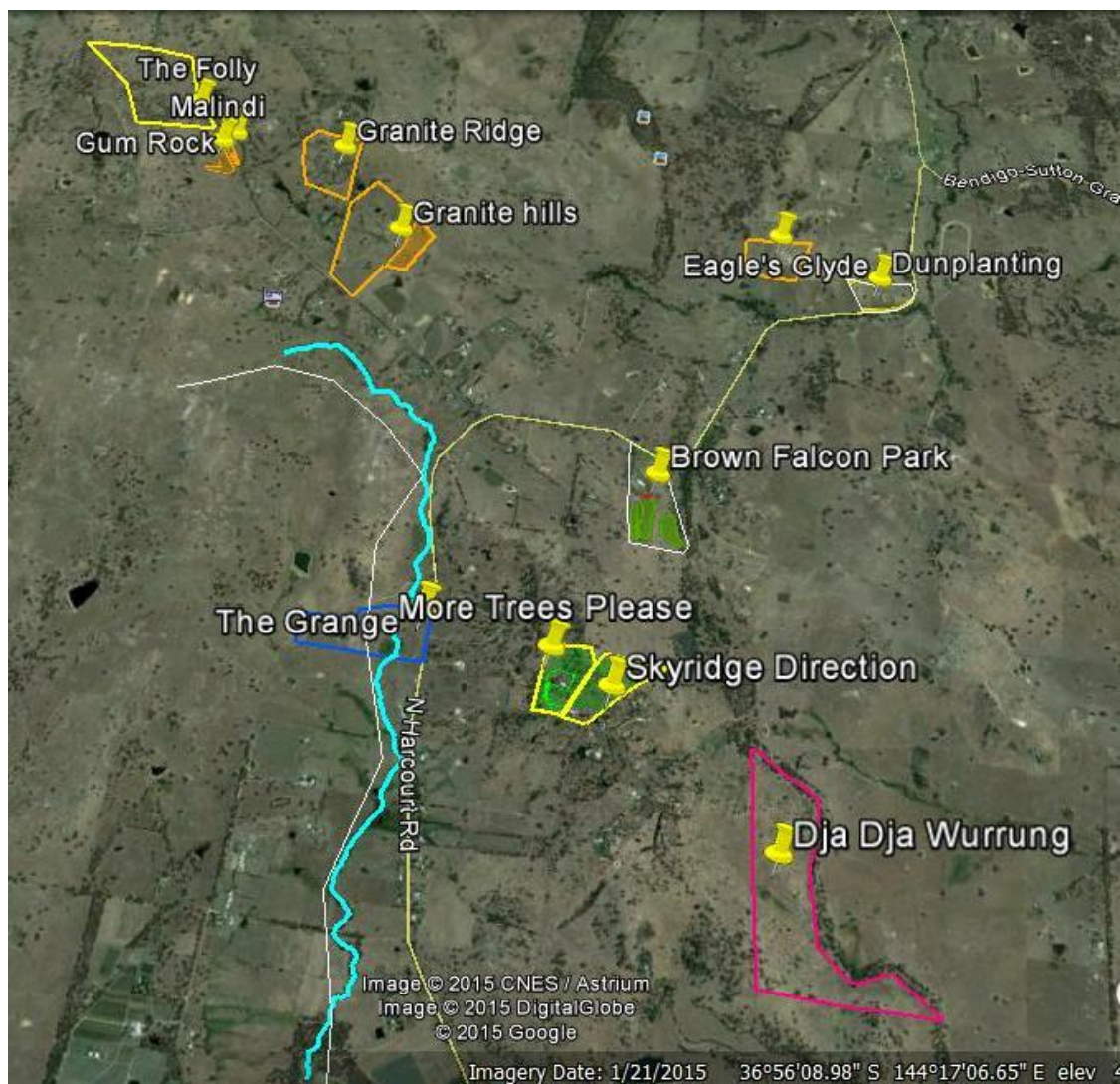
- located in or near Harcourt North
- stock-free in the long term.
- a large area away from buildings.
- able to be ripped.

An inspection was conducted of each property to determine its suitability. The informal assessment included planting areas, access, fire risk, services, car parking, stock and fences. Following this, a plan was developed for each property.

Twelve landholders committed to the project providing capacity for 50.7 hectares of planting.

Landholders were invited to attend a project information session. This session provided background information, project timelines and the expectations, possible costs and impacts for the landholders.

Each landholder was set up with a site supervisor to support them during the project. The committee also organised a landholders' pack that included local plant and Landcare information.



Site Preparation



Due to the scale of the planting task, landholders were asked to rip the planting areas in preparation for the event. Although the cost fell to the landholder, the committee offered to assist landholders with this task. The committee linked landholders with suitably qualified and experienced contractors, inspected sites, reviewed and proposed planting areas, provided quotations and managed work on-site. Some landholders completed the ripping themselves, others organised their own contractors and many accepted the committee's offer of assistance.

All care was taken to ensure that ripping did not cause harm. Services were located, native grass was protected and ripping was conducted parallel with the contours to avoid erosion. Tracked machinery was used where ripping was conducted on steep gradients. Ripping was completed at 3 to 4 m spacing to provide plant spacing of 3 to 4 m or 800 plants per hectare.

The best prepared sites were ripped and cultivated, providing a smooth, even and open soil for planting. Unfortunately, some sites were unsuitable for ripping due to steep slopes, poor access or fragile soils.



"I have participated in National Tree Day events before, but it's the first time I have done something on this scale." Dale



Image: Ripped and cultivated soil.

Results

In 6 degrees and 6mm rain over 600 people planted over 30,000 trees and shrubs in one day. That is more than 10 years of local Landcare work. Truly incredible!

In one of the coldest weekends in many years, it was amazing that so many volunteers turned out to the event. While we did not reach our volunteer targets, we were pleased that so many people braved the freezing conditions. They weren't only registered volunteers either. Over one hundred people registered on the day!

We made a fantastic start and the briefing, site set up, registration and planting all progressed very well. The rain set in around 11.30 and a few people packed up and left a little early but most soldiered on until the finish. They were rewarded with hot sausages and a warm fire at Tread Café in Harcourt. The Harcourt and District Lions kept the sausages coming and Tread Café owners and staff were busy making tea and coffee to warm people up.

The chilling weather and short lead time resulted in fewer volunteers than anticipated. Considering the mammoth task we had set, the result was amazing and fortunately, we had a contingency plan.

Contingency plan

With an event planned in mid-July, there was always a chance that poor weather could derail the project. So prior to the event, the 40,000 Trees Team set up a contingency plan. The plan included:

- Higher plant numbers allocated to ripped properties.
- Seedlings delivered to a single or dual location at each property. This meant that unplanted seedlings were not left lying around paddocks and could be collected if needed.
- Planting numbers per volunteer calculated at a low rate to account for worst case scenario.
- Landholders informed that while we aimed to plant all seedlings, this was not guaranteed.
- Middleton Prison confirmed they would provide teams to finish any planting required in the weeks following the event.



The 40000 Trees team handed out wooden plant markers for volunteers to leave personal dedications.



"(I) Might have planted 150 or 200 trees - didn't bother to count. Just being part of that willing 'army' of volunteers was a privilege." Solway

"My very deep thank you for all of your efforts and long hours in getting this shebang of a day off the ground." Regina



*"It was great to be involved in such an amazing event and we thank all the organiser(s) for having the energy and enthusiasm to run the day. Well done!"
The Clan McKay.*



Follow Up

At the end of the event day, the 40,000 Trees team held a brief meeting to review the day. We were exhausted, thrilled and a little overwhelmed that this ambitious project had been successful. There were a few tasks still to be completed and the wet weather and lower than anticipated volunteer numbers meant organising follow up plantings.

Immediate follow up included; collecting toilets, sending out results to all the volunteers and thanking our sponsors, volunteers and landholders.

In the week following the event we returned tools, assisted with lost property, updated the facebook page and completed final media commitments. The numbers of remaining plants were calculated and landholders were asked if they required assistance.

Of the properties not completely planted on event day, four finished with the help of family & friends, a couple persevered on their own and Middleton Prison teams assisted two landholders.

The final tasks to be completed were finalising the budget and preparing reports.



The 40,000 Trees Team published this thank you message on Facebook on 12 July 2015.

"40,000 Trees has been supported by Landcare, Connecting Country, City of Greater Bendigo, Mt Alexander Shire, The Hub Foundation, Mash2, Tread Cafe and the Harcourt and District Lions Club. Many more have contributed, you know who you are. Most of all thank you to all the volunteers who braved the weather to create these wildlife corridors for our future.

Thank

you."

LEARNINGS:

Skilled team members
 The power of social media
 Defined action/task list
 Site preparation
 Clear communication
 Contingency plan



*"I had a wonderful day thank you
 to all the organisers and the
 fabulous volunteers who turned out.
 The cold and rain could not stop
 the very warming spirit of the day."*
 Margot



Learnings

Skilled team members

The correct balance of skills and experience within the organising team was essential to the event being successful. The assistance of a paid event manager, works manager and social media consultant were critical to support the Barkers Creek Landcare Network volunteers. Tasks were allocated according to individual strengths and the team shared the load of the long list of tasks.

The power of social media

The committee knew that the ambitious scale of the event required quick and broad publicity. Teamwork and social media enabled our message to reach over 100 newspapers, community groups, media outlets, radio stations, community event listings and organisations. Regular updates and posts kept our audience engaged. We learnt that the more times someone hears about the event the more likely they are to take action and register.

Defined action/task list

The time lines for the project were very tight so it was important that all tasks were written down, allocated to a team member and given a due date. Our event manager managed the task list and ensured that everything was running to the very tight schedule.

Site Preparation

Site preparation varied between sites. While the committee could offer assistance, it could not compel landholders to accept assistance with their site preparation. The quality of soil preparation affected planting ease and speed, a critical element in an event of this scale.

Clear communication

Very early in the project, the committee sat down to clarify the purpose of the project and the message we intended to share. We had multiple people delivering the message so it was critical that everyone was delivering the same information to ensure that we created maximum impact.

Contingency Plan

With an event planned in mid-July, there was always a chance that poor weather could derail the project. Planning ahead was crucial.