Platypus recovery in the Mt Cole creek:

A community-lead comprehensive approach to restoring landscape function to bring back an Icon species

Project Description

Historically, Mt Cole Creek, a major tributary of the Wimmera River, flowed throughout the year. Recollections from local community members recount a time in the not too distant past, of swimming in it, people travelling from afar to fish in it for abundant native fish like Black Fish, and regular sightings of Platypus. The creek was of great cultural value for the local community and it was a refuge and corridor for the preservation and movement of native fauna in a largely cleared landscape.

The Mt Cole Creek of today is a very different place. In a very good year the creek flows but minimally. Black fish are no longer found below the Mt Cole Reservoir and there is no evidence of Platypus still living in it. Deep pools which are crucial summer refuges for native fish, Platypus and other water dependent fauna are now scarce and in poor condition. These pools no longer the provide sanctuary or recreation for the local community over the hot and dry summer months.

A major reason for this dramatic change is a lack of water flow; partly due to a warmer and drier climate and partly due to the raising of the dam wall at the Mt Cole reservoir in the late 1980's. This combined with the progressive effect of the sedimentation of deep pools due to eroding soils and gullies in surrounding farmland, the impact of stock watering in the remaining pools along the creek as well as the contributing effects of invasive plants and animals have all culminated in the creeks current state of degradation.

The Crowlands/Warrak Landcare group are deeply saddened by the demise of the creek, which has happened in their lifetimes. They are seeking solutions to turn around its plight and restore Platypus once again.

The Landcare Group, with the local community, have been in positive discussions with the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority and Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water around securing environmental water releases from the now decommissioned (for domestic supply) Mt Cole Reservoir.

Excitingly, because of this community effort, the agencies are now working to return water from the Reservoir to the creek this winter.

The community now want to ensure that the waters return results in real ecological and social outcomes.

This project aims to build a comprehensive-catchment approach to return the Mt Cole Creek and its catchment to a functioning, productive healthy waterways over the next 10 years through strategic and evidence-based

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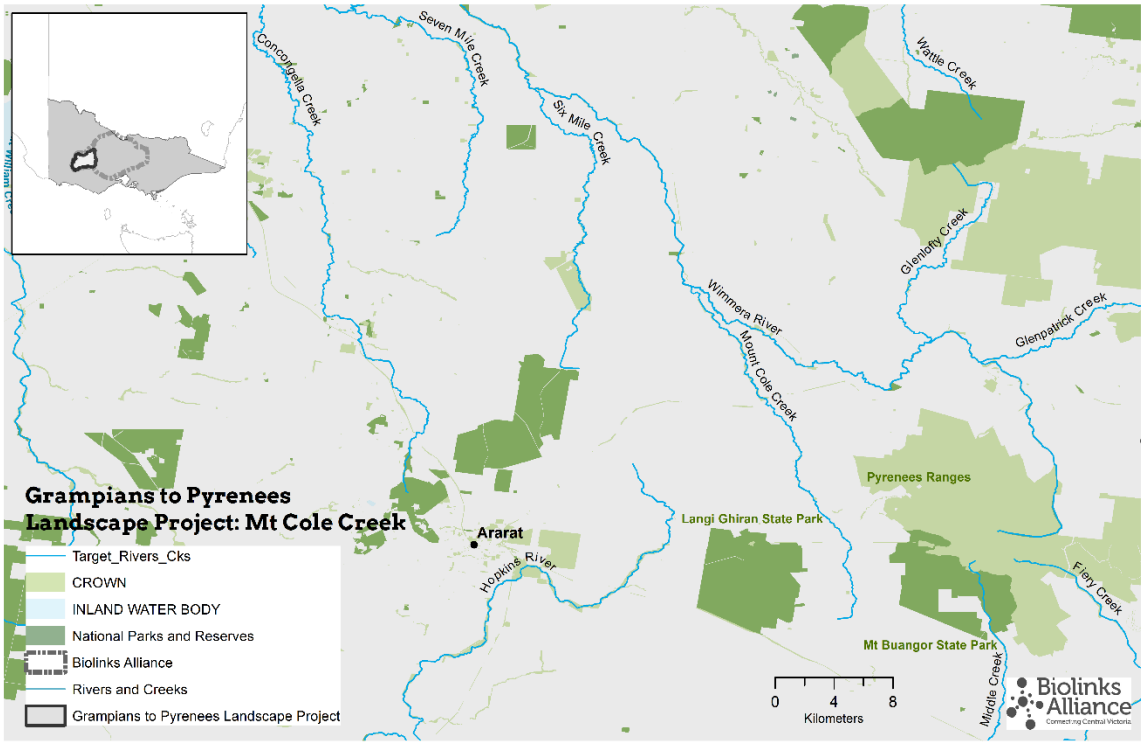

restoration works, collaboration, innovation and community capacity building.

Activities

Over two years the project will undertake restoration works that are immediately required to take advantage of imminent environmental water releases as well as broad community engagement, education and strategic planning.

- Revegetation of drainage lines and creek flood plain areas to stabilize soil and decrease sedimentation of deep holes
- Off-stream watering to restrict stock access to creek.
- Waterway fencing to restrict stock access and degradation of banks and water quality
- Earthworks to dredge previously deep, but now sedimented, waterholes and re-snagging of deep pools
- Invasive plant and animal control
- Broad community education and engagement
- Development a Mt Cole Creek Catchment Action Plan that addresses systemic catchment-wide issues affecting Mt Cole Creek
- Development of a Platypus re-introduction plan
- Development of project prospectus's to build community capacity to lever further funding from diverse sources for the implementation of key projects.

Local community will work in partnership with Project Platypus and be additionally supported by the Biolinks Alliance with science, planning and wider-collaboration.

These activities are key foundational steps of a ten-year plan to secure and recover Platypus populations through important climate refugial areas in central Victoria. By focusing on Platypus, they are also restoring habitat for other threatened species including Black Fish.

"There is no top down government solution to conservation in the 21st Century…its bigger than any one of us can manage"

Dr Gary Tabor, Co-founder Yellowstone 2 Yukon, Director Centre for Large Landscape Conservation

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Project outcomes

1. Increase in the extent and quality of habitat for threatened riparian, floodplain and aquatic species and improvement in the overall ecological health of the Mt Cole Creek

2. Demonstration of the techniques and strategies needed to repair damaged catchments by slowing water run-off with revegetation, soil surface repair and gully restoration

3. Greater community capacity to manage land for ecological and cultural values as well as production.

4. Evidence-based plans for where the greatest catchment and waterway health improvements can be obtained and for the successful reintroduction of Platypus

5. New networks that bring groups together with a common purpose, that have access to necessary science and best-practice and are able to work across scales and jurisdictional boundaries to connect and protect the environment.

6. Flagship project of the Grampians to Pyrenees Biolink, which identifies Mt Cole Creek as a key asset in the Pyrenees Enhancement Priority Zone.

Budget

Strategic Support (BA; $50k)
Project officer (PP; $100k)
Earthworks (Contractor; $50k)
Fencing (Contractor; $70k)
Revegetation and invasive control (PP; $60k)
Off-stream watering (Contractor; $40k)
Community engagement (PP; 20k)
Total Project costs (2 years) $390,000

Community

Biolinks Alliance

Biolinks Alliance is the only organisation in Victoria dedicated to inclusive, large-scale conservation – designed to foster coalitions to align and coordinate efforts, to bring in the planning and know-how to ensure we work smartly and succeed. Biolinks Alliance has identified a unique role for itself as a partnership and capacity building organisation that will ensure that the significant momentum there is for community-driven conservation on public and private land in central Victoria is supported, coordinated and amplified. Its 18 member Landcare and conservation management networks extend from the Grampians to the Victorian Alps and from the Macedon Ranges to the Murray River. Biolinks Alliance partnered with Project Platypus and lead the development of the Grampians to Pyrenees Biolink Conservation Action Plan.

Crowlands / Warrak landcare group

The Crowlands / Warrak landcare group is a very active and competent group of local landholders who are the main driver for improving the state of this very important local waterway. A number of landholders within the group own a good portion of frontage along the creek and will be great partners in any restoration work. Hear member Mark McKew talk about the Creek.

Project Platypus

Alliance member organisation, Project Platypus represents 11 landcare groups working in Stawell - Beaufort districts.

Landowners

Project partners

Great Eastern Ranges initiative

The Great Eastern Ranges is a strategic response to the impacts of climate change, invasive species, land clearing and other threats to our unique biodiversity and iconic landscapes. Biolinks Alliance is one of the Great Eastern Ranges Initiatives regional delivery partners and Glideways is a project of the Great Eastern Ranges.

Wimmera Catchment Management Authority

Leading major waterway improvement and protection projects in the region including the Wimmera River and its tributaries.

Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water

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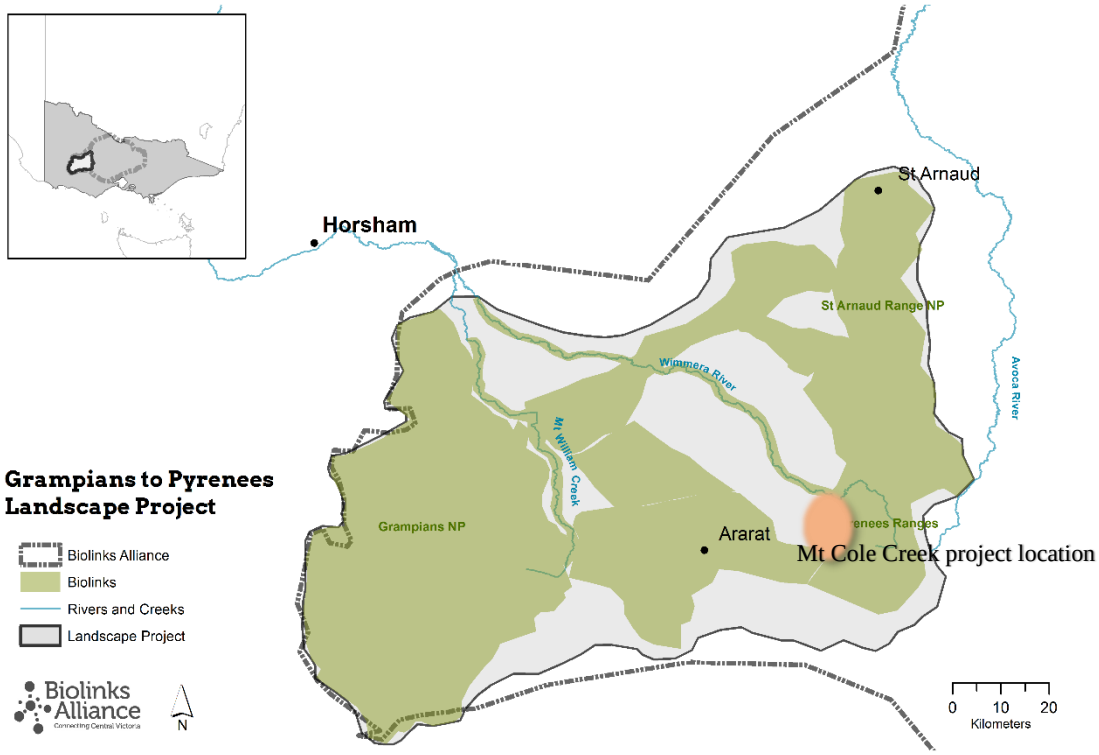

Grampians to Pyrenees Biolink

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