

Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee Annual Report 2000/2001



Northern Territory Government

Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment

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BACKGROUND

Found in Darwin's northern suburbs Rapid Creek drains a catchment of nearly 30 square kilometres. The creek and its catchment form the only significant freshwater system in Darwin and hence it is a valuable community asset. Increasing development in the catchment has necessitated closer management to ensure the protection of remnant vegetation and in particular the creek amenity and its water quality.

In 1994 the Darwin City Council and Greening Australia NT developed the Rapid Creek Management Plan. The plan proposed a range of strategies for implementation. The most fundamental requirement was to set up a management structure to coordinate implementation of the plan. In response to the plan and requests from the Rapid Creek Landcare Group the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment offered to set up a catchment management committee for Rapid Creek in 1996.

The Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee was established through the Water Act in 1996. The Committee considers and advises on policy for management of the natural resources of the catchment.

The Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee advises the Controller of Water Resources who in turn is accountable to the Minister for Planning and Environment. The Committee is required to report at least annually to the Minister and more frequently at significant milestones.

This is the fourth Annual Report.

MEMBERSHIP

- | | | |
|-----|---|-------------------------|
| 1. | Officer Commanding, Defence Northern Region | Commonwealth Government |
| 2. | The General Manager, Darwin International Airport | Industry |
| 3. | His Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Darwin | Local Government |
| 4. | The President, Larrakia Association | Community |
| 5. | The Chancellor, NT University | Industry |
| 6. | The Chairperson, Greening Australia NT | Community |
| 7. | The Chairperson, Rapid Creek Landcare Group | Community |
| 8. | The Assistant Secretary, Natural Resources Division, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment | NT Government |
| 9. | Member of Legislative Assembly | Community |
| 10. | Representative Parks and Wildlife Commission | NT Government |

The Committee is chaired by the Manager, Landcare, Natural Resources Division, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment. During 2000 the Committee successfully requested the Minister for Planning and Environment nominate a representative from the Parks and Wildlife Commission to be permanently included on the Committee.

MANAGEMENT PLAN AND REPORTING FRAMEWORK

The *Rapid Creek Management Plan* (1994) is the Committee's Working document. This is called the Management Plan throughout this report.

The Committee has devised a Reporting Framework based on the Catchment Strategies described in Chapter 5 of the Management Plan.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Using the Rapid Creek Management Plan as a reference that will be continually revised and updated, the Committee will consider and advise on policy and procedures and promote community awareness and research in the catchment.

Terms of Reference	Reported Under	Page
1. Progressively review the Rapid Creek Management Plan	Planning Issues Addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Management Plan and Reporting Framework	4
2. Through advice, coordination and initiatives implement the Management Plan maximising stakeholder involvement (seeking funding and implementing works)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activities within the catchment	7
3. Advocate the catchment values to the community	Education and Awareness: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access and Interpretation• Website	11 11
4. Provide advice as appropriate on land use in the catchment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activities within the catchment Planning Issues Addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yankee Pools area• O3 Creek Corridor Status	7 12 13
5. Promote research on processes which affect catchment values. Collect and review relevant research and surveys carried out or affecting the catchment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activities within the catchment	7

MEETINGS AND ATTENDANCE

The Committee met four times during the 2000/2001. A sub committee met with the Chairman Development Consent Authority on 9/04/01 to discuss planning issues associated with the O3 corridor. Attendance was as follows:

ORGANISATION	MEMBER/DELEGATE	MEETING	SUB COMMITTEE
Defence	Tony Law	3	
Darwin International Airport	Simon Draper	1	
	Dan Richards	2	1
	Ian Kew	2	
Darwin City Council	Brett Shearer	1	
	Jim Mitchell	2	1
Larrakia Association	Donna Jackson	3	
NT University	Hugh Clelland	1	
Greening Australia			
	Graeme Suckling	4	1
	Liza Schenkel	1	
Rapid Creek Landcare Group	Peter O'Hagan	4	1
Member of Legislative Assembly	Phil Mitchell	4	1
Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment	Mike Burgess	1	
	Rod Applegate	1	
Parks and Wildlife Commission	Dal Hartley	1	
Chairperson	Libby Benson	4	
Minutes / Correspondence / Coordination	Steve Popple	4	1

ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE CATCHMENT

Darwin City Council

Council's involvement in maintenance has continued at previous levels, mainly in the Water Gardens section.

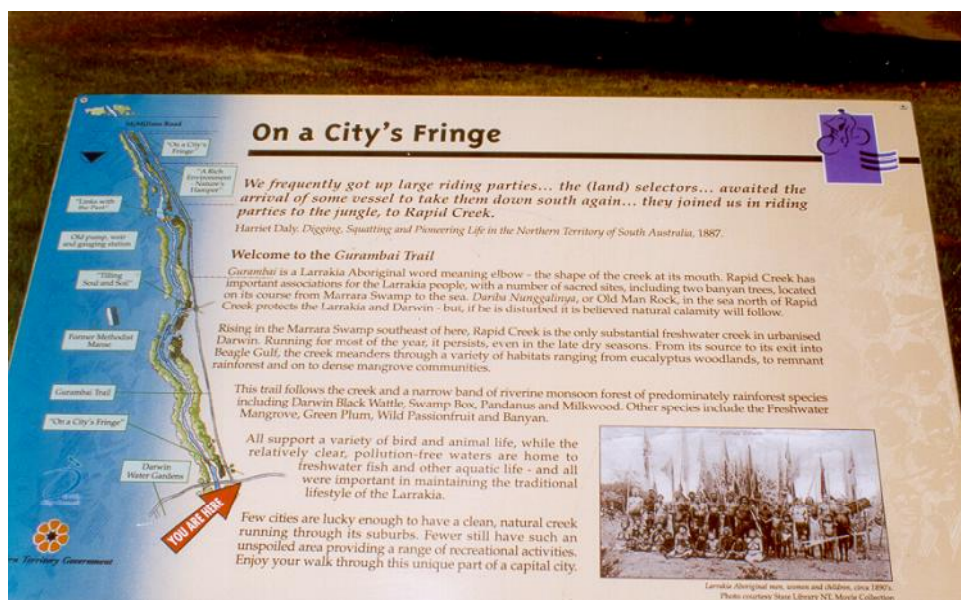
The completion of the Natural Heritage Trust Grants in October 2000 left a huge hole in the capacity to manage the corridor to a level previously provided by Greening Australia NT, utilising the Natural Heritage Trust funds.

Work undertaken including weed, fire control and revegetation during the year was minimal and its beyond Council's capacity to continue the level of service previously provided under the Natural Heritage Trust program.

Council engaged a Consultant to prepare a maintenance scope of works and costing in accordance with adopted Fire, Weed and Revegetation Plans. Other items of work included rubbish control, traffic management, fencing and gates etc. The annual cost of this work was estimated at over \$300,000, but without any additional revegetation work, the amount was reduced to a more manageable sum of \$150,000. However, Council during its 2001/2002 budget deliberations resolved to not commit to this level of expenditure and no additional funds were allocated for maintenance of Rapid Creek including the recently acquired Yankee Ponds area.

Funding was also sought to amend the Rapid Creek Plan of Management, which resulted in this Advisory Committee being formed. Unfortunately no source of money could be identified to fund the amendment of the Plan of Management.

As this important natural corridor requires exceptional biological management skills and considerable resources far beyond the capacity of Local Government, the top priorities need to be addressed by the Rapid Creek Management Advisory Committee in 2001/2002.



Interpretive signage highlights points of interest along the Rapid Creek corridor.

Greening Australia

Since the cessation of Natural Heritage Trust funding for on-ground works in June 2000, the role of Greening Australia has become mainly advisory. However, Greening Australia has continued to support the work of the community and some land managers in managing, protecting and rehabilitating Rapid Creek catchment. An example of this is the assistance provided to Darwin City Council, in cooperation with Parks and Wildlife Commission staff, with control burning in the Charles Eaton Drive area during June 2001. Greening Australia also assisted Darwin International Airport and visiting sailors with a tree planting program and provided trees for Arbor Week planting's conducted by the Rapid Creek Landcare group. In addition to the above support, Greening Australia hosts the Waterwatch Coordinator responsible for the Rapid Creek catchment.



Coffee bush was removed from drain flowing into Rapid Creek from the Water Gardens. This was a cooperative effort involving Green Corps, Darwin City Council and Rapid Creek Landcare Group. The drain was replanted during the wet season.

Parks and Wildlife Commission

The Commission commenced revision of the Casuarina Coastal Reserve Plan of Management, which was over five years old. Public consultation was commenced with public meetings and focus group sessions to discuss future directions for the Plan. A presentation was made to the RCCAC by PW CNT staff as to the Management Plan process and key issues to be addressed.

Department Infrastructure, Planning and Environment

The Land Administration section is continuing to maintain firebreaks and hazard reduction slashing in accordance with the Fire Management Plan produced by Greening Australia NT. The maintenance is carried out every three weeks during the wet season and every six weeks during the dry season. The Urban Enhancement unit was responsible for the coordination of infrastructure development including cycle paths and signage. The Natural Resources division provides administrative support to the RCCAC and assists in the coordination of activities by land managers throughout the catchment. The Department was the partner agency for a Round 23 Green Corp project which provided on ground maintenance support to rehabilitation activities.

Darwin International Airport

Darwin International Airport continued its environmental management program to reduce the impact of airport activities on the Rapid Creek catchment. Major works included the installation of three (3) Humeceptor units at a total cost of \$122,000 on the Regular Public transport apron in the front of the terminal to intercept floating hydrocarbons and sediments flowing off the apron. A review of all tenants facilities was conducted to identify potential sources of pollution to stormwater, with the aim of ensuring all sources of trade waste are connected to sewer. Installation of remote alarm systems at sewage pump stations was completed on airport to notify technical staff of any systems failures.

A five year prioritised erosion control implementation plan was developed to give the airport ongoing guidance for erosion control works. The highest priority works identified in this plan commenced early in the new financial year. The Airport has formed a commercial relationship with the Larrakia Nation for the ongoing maintenance of the newly planted trees as well as rubbish pick up across the site and rehabilitation works in the Yankee Pools area.

Waterwatch

Waterwatch continued monitoring of water quality throughout Rapid Creek with assistance provided by a Green Corps team with Wet season testing at a number of sites.

No significant changes were detected from previous results with overall water quality continuing to be good for a creek located within an urban catchment. Generally deterioration of water quality occurs during the late dry season when the creek flow ceases and during the early wet season when accumulated gross pollutants and oils are flushed into the creek. During the coming year Waterwatch monitoring is going to be focused on testing for heavy metals at several sites, source detection of nutrient inflows and sampling of stormwater inflows.

Rapid Creek Landcare Group

The group has continued its monthly working bees concentrating on the maintenance of recent tree planting's, coffee bush eradication and general weed control. The group members contributed 298 hours to on ground works throughout the catchment during the year. Members were also involved in Clean Up Australia Day, World Environment Day, National Tree Day and Landcare Week activities. A number of members participate in the Tree Growers at Home scheme where they propagate plants for planting by the group. The group acknowledges the assistance of Lesley Alford in producing a newsletter of activities and events in the catchment. The group has continued its involvement in community action regarding subdivisions within the O3 conservation zone.



Sailors from the USS Paul Hamilton joined with Rapid Creek Landcare Group members in planting trees along the Rapid Creek corridor in January 2000

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Access and Interpretation

The Northern Territory Government Urban Enhancement program funded an extension to the cycleway network between Kimmorley Bridge and Red Bridge located in the Water Gardens. Approximate length was 816 metres at a total cost of \$88,000 which included interpretive signage. This cycleway was constructed in March 2001, and has proved very popular increasing the number of local residents using the creek corridor. Additional paths are planned throughout the creek corridor in accordance with the Access and Interpretation MasterPlan.

Website

The Rapid Creek Plan of Management and all RCCAC Annual Reports are available on the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment's Web site on the Internet and linked to a report on the Rapid Creek Landcare Group and the Rapid Creek Waterwatch reports. The Web site can be found at www.landcare.com.au



Rapid Creek mouth forms the western boundary of Casuarina Coastal Reserve which is managed by the Parks & Wildlife Commission. A representative from the Parks and Wildlife Commission was appointed to the Committee in 2001.

PLANNING ISSUES ADDRESSED

Yankee Pools area

There are currently four landowners in the area known as Yankee Pools where there are issues of weed invasion, inappropriate fire regime, altered drainage and uncontrolled vehicle access. The Committee considers that the most effective way of addressing these issues is to reduce the number of landowners within the Yankee Pools area. The Yankee Pools management proposal developed by the Committee recommends that one organisation manage the land with financial contributions being made from all landowners. The Committee recognises that this is a long term aim and is dependent on a number of factors which may not be resolved in the short term.

In order to formalise the process negotiations are currently in progress for a parcel of vacant crown land within the creek corridor to be transferred to the Darwin City Council. A Native Title claim is lodged over this area and needs to be resolved before issue can progress further. Application for subdivision of Crown Land was advertised to facilitate the transfer to Darwin City Council.

For further activity to happen in the area the ongoing management issues need to be resolved and balanced with community expectations in terms of access and amenity. The airport sees the opportunity to utilise the area as an important adjunct to its facilities



A new cycleway was constructed during 2001 from the Water Gardens to Kimmo rley Bridge.

O3 Creek Corridor Status

The Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee continued to lobby for the increased maintenance and improvement of public access along the O3 corridor. Two subdivision applications were approved during the year for land within the corridor with portions of the land identified for consolidation into the O3 corridor. Differences in the interpretation of the Land Use Objectives led to members of the RCCAC meeting with the Chairman of the Development Consent Authority to clarify the situation. Following this meeting the RCCAC organised an on site inspection of the creek corridor to determine the on ground impact of the approved subdivisions.

Maintenance of the O3 corridor was of particular interest to the committee, with all possibilities of improving maintenance explored. The committee wrote to the Minister for Planning and Environment requesting that additional funding be allocated to Darwin City Council for maintenance within the corridor. Unfortunately this application was unsuccessful, and the committee is continuing to explore options for rehabilitation of the corridor.



The replanted drain in the Water Gardens twelve months after removing the coffeebush.



Amendment No. 160 of the Darwin Town Plan 1990 rezoned the creek corridor from O2 (Open Space – Organised Recreation) to O3 (Open Space – Conservation) on 23 February 2000. The above drawing indicates the location of the O3 corridor. Currently blocks 4586 and 4589 have applications for subdivision approved.

APPENDIX

Progress on Catchment Issues at a Glance

1997

- 21 hectares of Riverine, Paperbark, Transitional and Coastal Monsoon Forest strategically revegetated.
- 30,000 seedlings planted in catchment.
- 10 hectares re-established using direct seeding and natural regeneration.
- 18 kilometres fencing erected within creek system.
- 1.5 kilometres of pedestrian track installed to control access along creek. Completed October 1999.
- 87 hectares managed cooperatively by landholders, GANT, Landcare members, community volunteers and Green Corps.
- 31 January 2000 Beneficial Uses of the freshwater reaches of Rapid Creek formally declared.
- 23 February 2000 Rapid Creek Planning Concepts and Land Use Objectives 2000 formally declared.
- Rapid Creek Catchment Fire Management Plan produced March 2000. Rapid Creek Catchment Revegetation Strategy Report produced. Rapid Creek Catchment Weed Management Plan produced April 2000. Rapid Creek Revised Management Plan reprinted April 2000.
- Rapid Creek Access and Signage Master Plan presented to Minister Lands Planning and Environment, representatives Parks and Wildlife Commission and endorsed by Darwin City Council.
- Rapid Creek Natural Heritage Trust funded Integrated Management Project successfully completed June 2000.
- Cycle path constructed from McMillans Road to Red Footbridge in Water Gardens March 2001.
- Membership of RCCAC extended to include representatives from Parks and Wildlife Commission.

2001