

This newsletter is issued by Colac Otway Shire to provide the community key updates about recovery following the fire.

Trees on public land owned by Colac Otway

Colac Otway Shire is finalising the brief to engage an independent arborist to assess hazardous trees on public land for which it is responsible in Wye River and Separation Creek.

To help inform the arborist's brief, the following principles have been developed:

- The assessment must ensure public safety
- The assessment should advise appropriate works to be undertaken, with tree maintenance as opposed to removal preferred where acceptable levels of public safety can be ensured.
- The assessment is to be undertaken by an arborist independent of companies that have undertaken work in Wye River and Separation Creek in response to the bushfire.

The arborist's assessments will be made public for information prior to any work being done.

As Colac Otway is undertaking this work independently, it is not constrained by Grocon's timing.

Further details on the timing of the works will be released in the coming weeks.

Community meetings THIS WEEK

Just a reminder that community meetings have been scheduled for this week.

Key topics to be discussed include the outcomes of the Asset Protection Zone Review, Bushfire Attack Level outcomes and Building in a Bushfire Prone Area Guidelines. We will have experts Justin Leonard, CSIRO and Dr Kevin Tolhurst to talk through the technical aspects, along with a conversation piece with Dr Rob Gordon.

If you are unable to make the meetings the Melbourne meeting will be streamed live on Facebook, with the opportunity to ask questions through the comments section.

Audio has been improved following feedback from the last meeting.

Please note that the Wye River meeting will be held on Saturday to avoid Father's Day.

The community meeting dates are:

Thursday, 1 September, 5.30pm-7pm

Room 3, Richmond Town Hall

And

Saturday, 3 September, 10.30am-12 noon

Wye River Surf Life Saving Club

Changes to the landscape

As Winter comes to a close and the warmer Spring weather starts to loom, community members in Wye River and Separation Creek may notice changes to trees and tree stumps in the area. Changes may include coppice regrowth or epicormic growth, which are all a natural part of regrowth.

Find out more about coppice regrowth and epicormic growth on WyeSep Connect.

As the warmer months approach, the Victorian Government will continue to update the community on the expected changes to flora and fauna in the area.

What's On in September

Melbourne community meeting

Thursday, 1 September, 5.30pm-7pm

Room 3, Richmond Town Hall

Wye River community meeting

Saturday, 3 September, 10.30am-12 noon

Wye River Surf Life Saving Club

Community Environment Day

Sunday, 3 September 12 noon -3pm

Wye River Surf Life Saving Club

Water tank location confirmed

Work to install a water tank donated to the Wye River and Separation Creek communities is set to begin following a community vote to determine its location.

The Lions Club of Lorne donated the 19,000-litre tank to the towns following the Christmas Day fires.

Community members were provided an opportunity to nominate their preferred location online, via email or post.

The majority vote preferred the Harrington Park location, east of the barbecue shelter and above the car park.

Colac Otway Shire Council will now work with plumbers to complete the installation over the next fortnight. This work will include connecting the tank to capture water runoff from the barbecue shelter roof and installing a pump and filter system.

Community Environment Day

Local residents and visitors are invited to join the Wye River and Separation Creek Community Environment Day, following the Community Meeting in Wye River on Saturday 3 September.

The event will start with lunch at the Wye River Surf Lifesaving Club from 12pm, followed by a nature talk, where participants can meet local botanist Judi Forrester and learn about the indigenous plants that are now flourishing.

From 2.30pm, the Southern Otway Landcare Network, supported by the Wye/Sep Vegetation Restoration Committee, is generously providing fire-tolerant native plants.

Community members who would like to attend are encouraged to bring a bucket to carry plants.

This event is supported by the CRC Flora and Fauna Beachscape Work Group.

Reducing the risk

As of 1 September 2016, the State Emergency Service (SES) will be taking the lead for any landslide incidents in Victoria.

Victoria Police, as the current coordinator of the Regional Emergency Management Team established to monitor and oversee risk reduction works in Wye River and Separation Creek, will be working with the SES to look at how to best transition the coordination role. Victoria Police will continue to monitor and conduct regular patrols to help ensure community safety until a transition plan has been developed and implemented.

In July Colac-Otway Shire engaged an independent expert to assess what immediate works could be undertaken to reduce the risk of landslip in Wye River and Separation Creek.

Council has now received the Erosion and Sediment Control Plan which recommends a number of temporary treatments that can be put in place to manage stormwater runoff while retaining walls and appropriate drainage systems are built.

The recommendations include a combination of:

Hydromulching – where native seeds and mulch material is sprayed onto an area to encourage grass propagation.

Silt fences – where fences consisting of timber stakes and matting or mesh materials are installed to catch silt and debris generated by stormwater runoff. These fences are generally 600 mm high and 25m long.

Check drains – installed in the table drains running adjacent to the road to slow the velocity of stormwater and reduce the impact on the table drains.

Core logs – usually about 300mm in diameter, these are used in much the same way as silt fences to catch silt and debris generated by stormwater runoff.

Slope drains – above-ground drains made from plastic pipe, usually about 300mm in diameter and up to 50 metres long. These are installed to redirect stormwater from one point to another.

Some of these treatments are recommended for private properties. Colac-Otway Shire will speak directly to all affected property owners prior to works being undertaken. No works will occur on private land without owner consent.

The treatments are expected to be in place for up to 18 months.

Any works will be undertaken at no cost to the property owner and can be removed if the property owner is rebuilding their properties.

To support this work and the reinstatement and building of retaining walls for which Council is responsible, Council will be surveying council-owned roads and drainage lines from next week.

This will take several months and is intended to inform the design of retaining walls so they can be installed prior to next year's winter rainfall as well as road reconstruction works.

Retaining wall update

As of 30 August 2016, five retaining walls had been completed, with a further eight underway. A map of the retaining walls has been placed on WyeSep Connect and Grocon has been liaising directly with property owners where works are taking place on private properties.

Amy's Gran Fondo

Amy's Gran Fondo will hit the Great Ocean Road on Sunday 11 September. This means there will be a number of road closures in place.

A new course in 2016 takes riders through the Otway Ranges, along the Great Ocean Road to Apollo Bay, before returning to finish on the main street of Lorne.

Find the most up-to-date road closure information, including times, a detailed map and the traffic hotline [here](#).

Bird Box BBQ

On Tuesday 30 August, around 30 members of the community got together for the Wye to Wongarra Landcare Group Bird Box BBQ at Stribling Reserve in Lorne.

This provided a great opportunity for the participating Men's Sheds to discuss their bird box plan and other brilliant ideas. The boxes will help to replace the habitats of birds and small marsupials that were lost in the Christmas Day fires.

The boxes will be installed by qualified arborists high up in the trees for the anticipated inhabitants. As part of the project, arborists will also create artificial hollows as alternative habitat accommodation in other suitable trees.

The nest boxes are available at no cost and community members can order from a selection of boxes suitable for King Parrots, Rosellas, Kookaburras, Pardalotes, Micro-bats, Sugar-Gliders and Possums.

To order a nest box for your property, contact Yvonne Sheppard via 0407 883 116 or oldshep2@bigpond.com and provide your name, phone and email address, property address and preferred species type of habitat box.

A day with the birds

The native birds of Wye River and Separation Creek are among the area's greatest natural features.

Whether you're an experienced birdwatcher, or just admire them from afar, you can learn more about them at the WyeSep Bird Day on Saturday 8

October – an initiative of the CRC Flora, Fauna and Beachscape Work Group.

Ornithologist and operator of Victoria's longest running specialist bird guiding company, Simon Starr, will be guest speaker and guide for the day.

Starr will conduct an introductory talk about the birds of WyeSep and the Greater Otway's region, and also provide some general information about bird watching as a hobby.

The day will continue with a field trip to view local birds and, after lunch, another outing further afield – perhaps to Kennett River.

The day will run from 10am to 4pm. Participants are asked to bring a packed lunch, as well as binoculars and field guide if you have them. Dress for the weather and expect some walking.

RSVP is essential. Please contact Yvonne Sheppard on 0407 883 116 or oldshep2@bigpond.com to confirm your attendance.

Wye River Waterwatchers

A dedicated band of locals are keeping a close eye on the health of Wye's river.

Yvonne Sheppard, Carolyn Tatchell, Mark and Gail Chittleborough, Morag Campbell, Juliet Le Feuvre, Mary Eckhardt and Joanne Tyler make up the Wye River Waterwatch volunteers monitoring Wye River's water quality. And many of the group are also EstuaryWatch volunteers checking water quality in the estuary.

The volunteers have worked with Corangamite CMA Waterwatch coordinator Kristen Lees monitoring water quality at two sites, one above the caravan park and the other at the fishing platform in Wye River for a number of years.

The data collected since the December bushfire indicates good water quality with no discernible impact from the fire on the river.

Kristen said water testing had continued monthly, watching out for the potential for run-off to affect water clarity and sediment as a result of the impact of heavy rainfall on the fire-affected landscape.

"The commitment of the Waterwatch volunteers in Wye River is particularly impressive during the challenging time of the last six months, and for them to continue volunteering roles and contributing to the data set post fires is invaluable for assessing bushfire's impact on water quality," she said.

People can find out more about the Waterwatch program at www.waterwatch.vic.gov.au