IN INVOLVING LANDHOLDERS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF PROCLAIMED PLANTS

Ross Britton¹ and Phil Cramond²
¹ Primary Industries and Resources SA, GPO Box 1671, Adelaide, SA 5001
² Mount Lofty Ranges Animal and Plant Control Board, PO Box 42, Woodside, SA 5244

Abstract In the Mount Lofty Ranges (MLR) of South Australia local Animal and Plant Control Boards are taking the lead in a program to involve landholders and community groups in the management of Salvation Jane (Echium plantagineum) and a range of woody weeds.

Two innovative sub-programs: “Purple Peril Attack” and “Wallop a Woody Weed” are proving successful in attracting landholders, particularly from small holdings, to field days and information sessions on weed management. Held on Saturday mornings, the field days focus on using pastures, farm forestry and native vegetation to compete with Salvation Jane and other annual weeds and on the long-term management of woody weeds.

The overall program initially focussed on Salvation Jane and one local Animal and Plant Control Board area but has expanded to include the Greater Mount Lofty Ranges and to also target woody weeds.

Weed management programs in the Ranges have had to be tailored to the needs of “lifestyle” farmers, to enhance the riparian and other natural ecosystems of the Ranges and to minimise the risk of herbicide movement off-site.

INTRODUCTION

The Mount Lofty Ranges are on the eastern side of the City of Adelaide. The Ranges include three major water catchments with a network of riparian areas providing domestic and industrial water to the greater Adelaide region.

The majority of land holdings within the Ranges are small and owned by “lifestyle” farmers. Natural ecosystems are an important component of the land and water management in the Ranges. Viable grazing, horticulture, viticulture and forestry enterprises are scattered throughout the area.

Salvation Jane (Echium plantagineum) and woody weeds such as blackberry (Rubus fruticosus aggregate) and gorse (Ulex europaeus) cause major problems to most forms of land use in the Ranges. Lifestyle farmers have limited understanding of weeds and best practice management. In many cases they are not aware how to best access information and resources for weed control. Such farmers make up the major proportion of rural landholders in the Ranges.

METHOD OF APPROACH

Purple Peril Attack In 1994 Phil Cramond, authorised officer with the Mid Hills Animal and Plant Control Board, conducted an information night on the management of proclaimed plants. The meeting was well received and became an annual event over the next four years with an average meeting attendance of 38 landholders.

In 1996 two special meetings were held focussing on the control of Salvation Jane. These meetings attracted audiences of 47 and 46. Research and advisory personnel spoke at these meetings. In the same year a demonstration site was established to show local landholders the effectiveness of different herbicides on Salvation Jane in pasture. A field day was held on the site and was attended by 35 landholders.

In 1997 a local Landcare Group and a local Agricultural Bureau (farmer self-education group) joined forces with the Mid Hills Animal and Plant Control Board to develop a “plan of attack” to combat the spread of Salvation Jane and the high level of non-action by many landholders.

The “Purple Peril Attack” group was formed later in 1997. The group included members of the Agricultural Bureau group, the local Landcare group and representatives from the Mid Hills Animal and Plant Control Board, the hills Soil Conservation Boards’ Small Farms education program, Primary Industries and Resources SA (PIRSA) and the Animal and Plant Control Commission. The group decided that all field days would best be held on Saturday mornings.

The “Purple Peril Attack” group set up another herbicide demonstration site and used the site for two field
days. Different herbicides and application times were used to demonstrate the importance of using the best products at the correct growth stage of the Salvation Jane. The field days were held in May and November with an average attendance at each day of 30 landholders all of whom wanted to control Salvation Jane on their properties.

Assistance and support was provided by local government bodies and chemical suppliers and was used to place signage near the demonstration sites and to advertise field days.

The Purple Peril Attack group held an information night in autumn 1997 which stressed the importance of good pasture establishment and management when it comes to the control of Salvation Jane. This meeting was attended by 85 landholders.

Following the information night the group established another two demonstration sites on different soil types. Perennial pasture mixes were sown on these sites to demonstrate the effectiveness of dense vigorous pastures in suppressing Salvation Jane. Twenty landholders (20) attended a field day in spring 1997 to observe the two demonstrations.

In 1998 the Purple Peril Attack group planned a series of field days and demonstrations for the year, expanding the program to cover other areas of the Ranges and other ways of managing Salvation Jane. The first of these field days was held at the SA Water reservoir at Mt Bold. The 35 attendees were shown the positive impact revegetation with native trees and shrubs had had on the reduction of Salvation Jane. Information was also provided on the use of farm forestry and native grasses to manage Salvation Jane.

Another pasture demonstration site was established and a series of three field days were held during 1998 at this site, demonstrating herbicide treatments, pasture competition, sprayer operation and calibration. Treatments on the site highlighted the advantages of spraying early in the growth stages of the legume pasture species and the Salvation Jane and other broadleaf weeds. Attendances at these three field days were 52 (May), 48 (July) and 32 (October) respectively.

A field day was held later in the year on a new area to the north of the above mentioned demonstration sites. This field day attracted 52 landholders who had not attended any of the previous field days or information nights.

The program has continued to expand to new areas and attract new participants in 1999. The same themes are being used in 1999 and new demonstration sites established. The two field days held in March and May attracted 45 and 50 landholders respectively. A small seeder suitable for using with a four wheel drive, motor bike was demonstrated at the May field day.

A total of approximately 500 landholders have attended the Purple Peril Attack field days and information nights. Exit surveys at a number of field days indicate that very few people have attended more than one field day.

A further series of field days have been planned for the year 2000 extending into areas to the north and south of the current sites and field days.

**Wallop a Woody Weed** Following the success of the Purple Peril Attack program the newly formed Mt Lofty Ranges Animal and Plant Control Board decided to launch, in 1998, a similar program to raise awareness and encourage landholder action on woody weeds.

Two field days were held in February 1999. One field day was held on the banks of the River Torrens and focussed on controlling woody weeds along watercourses and the need for concerted effort over the long-term. Thirty-two (32) landholders attended this program. The second field day attracted 35 landholders and focussed on control of woody weeds near horticultural and viticultural crops and the different methods for applying herbicides to woody weeds. The benefits of reducing plant bulk by slashing or grooming before spraying was emphasised.

**Promotion** The two programs have benefited from the use of good signage at demonstration sites and along well used roads. Flyers and small posters have also been used effectively to advertise field days. The Soil Conservation Boards’ newsletter and Small Farms education program have helped spread the word. The Animal and Plant Control Boards distribute flyers to landholders with mail outs of other notices. Local Landcare groups have also helped promote the field days in their communities.

**Information Packs** Show bags have been used to hold information sheets and management guidelines on the key weeds and the various control methods. These packs have proved very popular providing landholders with information they have previously found very difficult to obtain.
DISCUSSION

The approach being taken by the Purple Peril Attack and Wallop a Woody Weed groups in the Mount Lofty Ranges is helping lifestyle farmers adopt sound practices to reduce the impact of Salvation Jane and woody weeds on the productive, amenity and natural environments of the Ranges.

The demonstration of management techniques, weed control equipment and provision of appropriate information at field days held on Saturday mornings has proven to be a key component of these two programs.

Linking the two programs to other programs such as the Soil Conservation Board Small Farms initiative, the Water Catchment Management Boards, the Animal and Plant Control Boards, the Agricultural Bureau and Landcare has been crucial to the success thus far.

The cooperation of chemical, fertiliser and seed suppliers together with that of staff from PIRSA has helped facilitate effective demonstrations and exchange of best practice information.

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- members of the Purple Peril Attack and Wallop a Woody Weed committees.