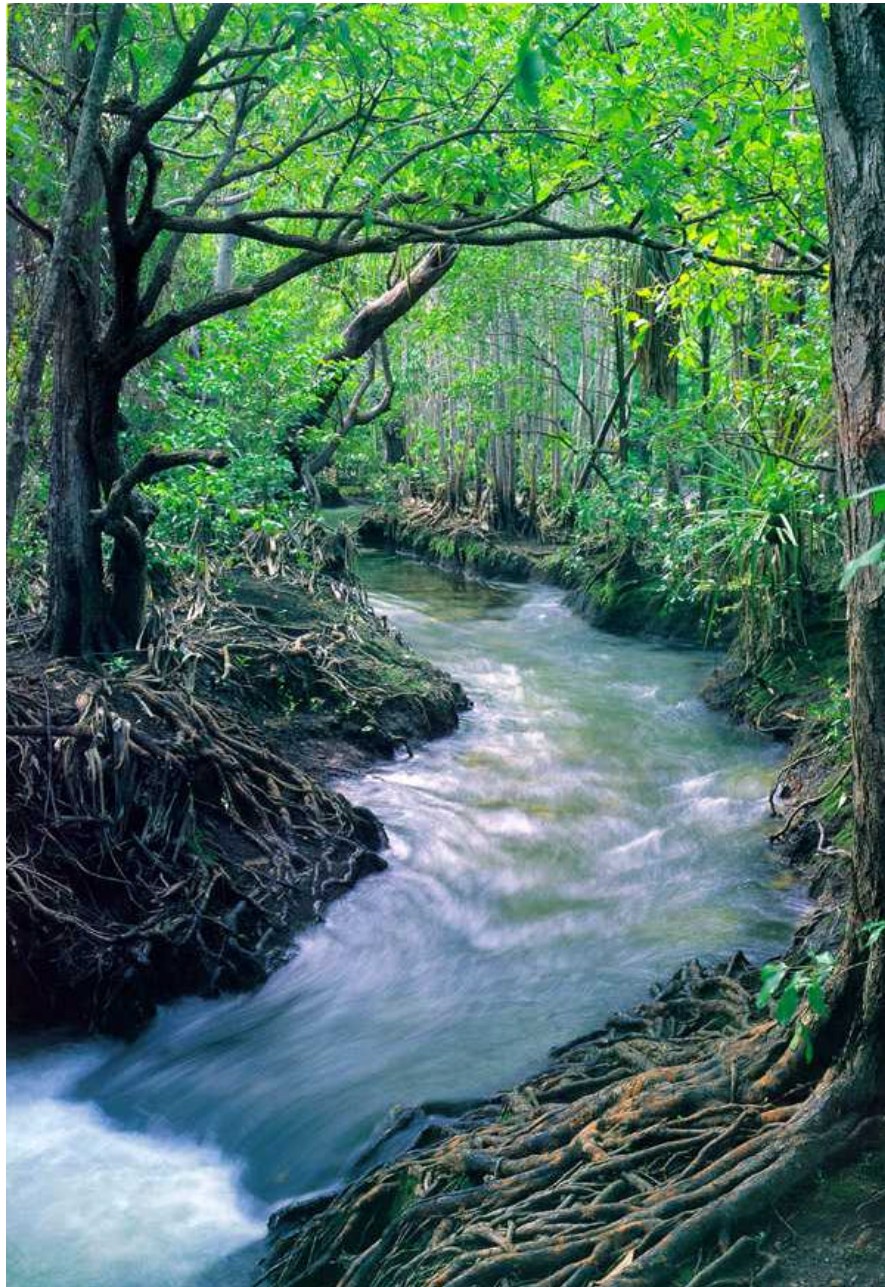


# **Rapid Creek Catchment Advisory Committee**



**Annual Report 1998/1999**

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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 Lands, Planning and Environment. The Committee is required to report at least annually to the Minister and more frequently at significant milestones.

This is the second Annual Report.

## MEMBERSHIP

- |    |                                                                                                                                                                |                            |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. | Officer Commanding, Defence Northern Region<br>(formerly Officer Commanding, Royal Australian Airforce)                                                        | Commonwealth<br>Government |
| 2. | The General Manager, Darwin International Airport<br>(formerly The General Manager, Federal Airports Corporation)                                              | Industry                   |
| 3. | His Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Darwin                                                                                                                  | Local<br>Government        |
| 4. | The President, Larrakia Association                                                                                                                            | Community                  |
| 5. | The Chancellor, NT University                                                                                                                                  | Industry                   |
| 6. | The Chairperson, Greening Australia NT                                                                                                                         | Community                  |
| 7. | The Chairperson<br>Rapid Creek Landcare Group                                                                                                                  | Community                  |
| 8. | The Assistant Secretary, Natural Resources Division, LPE<br>(formerly The Director Water Resources Division, Department<br>of Lands, Planning and Environment) | NT Government              |
| 9. | Member of Legislative Assembly                                                                                                                                 | Community                  |

The Committee is chaired by the Manager, Landcare, Natural Resources Division, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment.

## 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.

<b>Terms of Reference</b>	<b>Reported Under</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Progressively review the Rapid Creek Management Plan	Planning Issues Addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management Plan and Reporting Framework</li> </ul>	10
2. Through advice, coordination and initiatives implement the Management Plan maximising stakeholder involvement (seeking funding and implementing works).	On-Ground Work Implemented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vegetation Management</li> <li>Fire Management</li> <li>Waterwatch</li> </ul>	7 8 8
3. Advocate the catchment values to the community	Education and Awareness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access and Interpretation</li> <li>Website</li> <li>Demonstration Day</li> </ul> On Ground Work Implemented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Waterwatch</li> </ul>	9 9 9 8
4. Provide advice as appropriate on land use in the catchment	On-Ground Work Implemented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vegetation Management</li> <li>Fire Management</li> <li>Waterwatch</li> </ul> Planning Issues Addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yankee Pools area</li> <li>Rural Living Blocks between Trower Road and McMillans Road</li> <li>Beneficial Uses</li> <li>Rezoning of Section 4292</li> <li>Darwin International Airport</li> </ul>	7 8 8 10 10 10 11 11
5. Promote research on processes which affect catchment values. Collect and review relevant research and surveys carried out or affecting the catchment	Planning Issues Addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural Living Blocks between Trower Road and McMillans Road</li> <li>Darwin International Airport</li> </ul> On-Ground Work Implemented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fire Management</li> <li>Waterwatch.</li> </ul>	10 11 8 8
6. Report to the Minister (through the Controller of Water Resources) at least annually and more frequently as significant milestones are achieved		

## MEETINGS AND ATTENDANCE

The Committee met six times during the 1998/1999 year and all meetings have been well attended by the members or their delegates. The meeting dates were 4/8/98, 22/9/98, 24/11/98, 23/2/99, 28/4/99, and 16/6/99. Attendance was as follows:

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Member/Delegate</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
Defence	Peter Sims	2
	Robyn Maurer	1
	Jessica Jones	<u>1</u> 4
Darwin International Airport	Peter Stoner	4
Darwin City Council	Bob Morgan	5
Larrakia Association	Donna Jackson	3
	Bill Risk	<u>1</u> 4
NT University	Hugh Clelland	4
Greening Australia NT	Frank van der Sommen	2
	Alister Clark	<u>3</u> 5
Rapid Creek Landcare Group	Lex Martin	3
	Peter O'Hagan	<u>3</u> 6
Natural Resources Division, LPE	Mike Burgess	1
	Don Pidsley	3
	Ian Smith	<u>1</u> 5
Member of Legislative Assembly	Phil Mitchell	2
Chairperson	Libby Benson	6
Minutes/Correspondence/Coordination	Lesley Alford	6

At their June meeting the Committee met with the Honourable Tim Baldwin, Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment and explained the work carried out since the inception of the Committee. Members gave presentations on Yankee Pools, Fire Management and the Access and Signage Masterplan. The Minister entered into discussions with the Committee about management, planning and development issues in the catchment and a formal mechanism for notifying the Committee about relevant development proposals.



## ON-GROUND WORK IMPLEMENTED

### Vegetation Management

Greening Australia continued to coordinate the on-ground work for the Rapid Creek Integrated Catchment Management Project. This was the second year of the project, which is supported by the Natural Heritage Trust and is administered by Defence. The project aims to increase the extent of natural plant communities by strategically revegetating areas. It also aims to reduce the density and extent of weed invasions in and adjacent to remnant native vegetation.



**Revegetation work at Charles Eaton Drive**

At the end of January 1999, 340 hectares of existing vegetation had been protected/enhanced by the project and 13.25 hectares of native vegetation had been re-established. To protect vegetation, 17 kilometres of fencing has been erected and better fire and weed management strategies have been adopted. Direct seeding and tubestock planting methods have been used to re-establish native vegetation. Tree planting has been carried out by local schools, Green Corps, Rapid Creek Landcare Group, landholders and Greening Australia volunteers. Key areas of revegetation have been at Charles Eaton Drive, Rapid Creek Road and Casuarina Coastal Reserve. All seeds used for the project have been sourced from local native species within the catchment.

This three year project will continue until the end of the financial year 1999/2000. Greening Australia has been developing training workshops for the staff of landowners and managers with the aim that they will take over management of the revegetation areas themselves. As a result, the final year will focus on training the stakeholder land managers in best practice vegetation management techniques. In April 2000 Greening Australia provided all landowners and managers with copies of the Rapid



**Green Corps and school children plant trees**

Creek Catchment Weed Management Plan and Rapid Creek Catchment Revegetation Strategy which provide direction when considering weed control and revegetation work, they have also provided a number of training workshops in 2000. The long term success of the project depends on a commitment by landowners to continuing this work.

## Fire Management

The Committee has initiated research and documentation about fire management in the catchment. Greening Australia NT is currently coordinating an integrated fire management approach with the Darwin City Council, the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, Department of Defence, Darwin International Airport, Parks and Wildlife Commission NT and the NT Fire and Rescue Service. The decision of the latter to carry out pro-active burning in the Darwin area has been welcomed. Greening Australia aims to decrease the frequency, intensity and spread of wildfires and implement appropriate fire regimes. Fire is managed using a combination of techniques such as hazard reduction slashing and control burning. Fire has been excluded from sensitive Melaleuca forests and riverine monsoon vine forests. Appropriate controlled burning regimes have been implemented for woodland and transition communities.

In addition to the on-ground work, a fire management forum was conducted by Greening Australia



**Defence personnel carry out controlled burns**

in November at the Committee's request. After Greening Australia presented the Committee with their revised Weed And Fire Survey of the catchment the Committee requested a Northern Territory University student and Department of Lands, Planning and Environment staff to produce a series of maps showing the fire management areas. In March 2000 Greening Australia provided all landowners and managers with a copy of the Rapid Creek Catchment Fire Management Plan which incorporated the maps. The

Committee has also requested that monitoring and evaluation be carried out on the project over time.

## Waterwatch

Committee members were presented with a copy of the Rapid Creek Water Quality Report 1995/97 and the Rapid Creek Water Quality Report 1998 prepared by the Darwin Waterwatch Coordinator. The 1999 Rapid Creek Water Quality Report was received in early 2000. The Committee is considering a series of recommendations presented in the reports. The Committee complimented the Waterwatch network on their report and

encouraged them in their work. The Committee requested that the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment initiate discussions between themselves and the Waterwatch network on the roles of Waterwatch and the Committee and how data from the reports should be used.



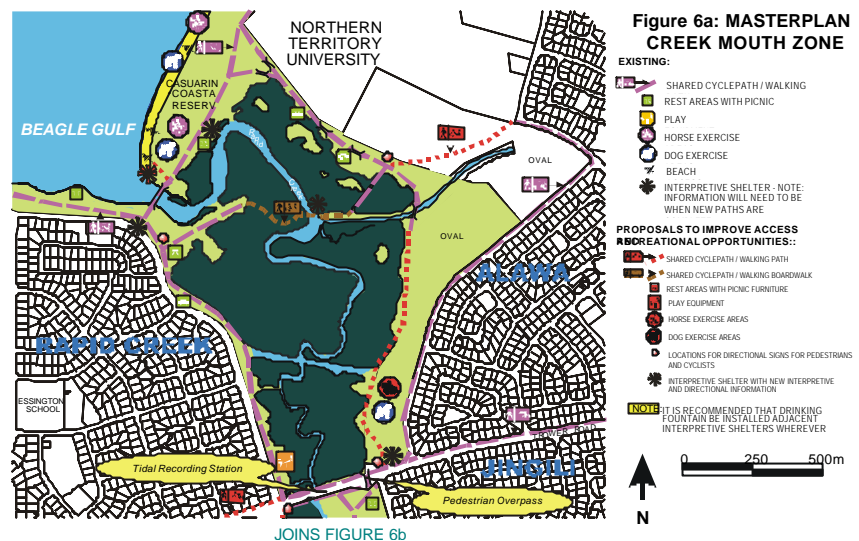
**Waterwatch staff training Green Corps**



## EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

### Access and Interpretation

The Committee continued to coordinate the development of the Access and Signage Masterplan. The Masterplan was completed by EcoSystems in June and will now be presented to potential funding bodies. The report was supported by the Urban Enhancement Program.



Map from the Access and Signage Masterplan

The Committee carried out extensive community consultation as part of the plan's development. The plan covers the whole catchment and provides links to existing path networks. In addition to walking and riding trails it includes interpretation of the area's natural and cultural history. Implementation in the lower catchment is seen as a higher priority due to the intense level of use.

### Website

Last year's Annual Report was placed on the Department of Lands, 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. An annotated bibliography is being compiled by Committee members which will include all documents written about the Rapid Creek area. When completed this will also be placed on the Internet. The Web site can be found at [http://lpe.nt.gov.au/dlpe/ecare/landcare/areport\\_contents.htm](http://lpe.nt.gov.au/dlpe/ecare/landcare/areport_contents.htm)

### Demonstration Day

A Bushcare Best Practice Demonstration Day organised by Greening Australia was attended by over fifty people in March 1999 during Landcare Month. Revegetation and fire and weed control techniques and Waterwatch monitoring techniques used in the Rapid Creek Integrated Catchment Management Project were explained to members of the public. This day was very well received. Steve Balch, MLA, Member for Jingili, attended this day and committed funding from the Northern Territory Government to Greening Australia to continue their work. \$7000 was presented to Greening Australia at their 1999 Annual General Meeting by Steve Balch, MLA.



Members of the public inspect revegetation work

## **PLANNING ISSUES ADDRESSED**

### **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 Management Plan which they use to set their priorities. This Reporting Framework was developed from the Catchment Strategies described in Chapter 5 of the Management Plan. A summary of the Catchment Strategies identified in the Management Plan is found in the Appendix.

### **Yankee Pools area**

There are 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 land ownership should be reduced to two landowners with one organisation managing the area. The Yankee Pools management proposal developed by the Committee has been endorsed in principle by all the landowners. The proposal recommends that one organisation manage the land with financial contributions being made from all landowners.

These recommendations have been taken on board by the landowners. It is likely that an offer will be made to the Darwin City Council of a parcel of vacant crown land within the creek corridor. The Darwin International Airport is considering realigning their boundary so that a 75 metre wide buffer along the creek in this area would revert to the Commonwealth. If these two actions take place, it will reduce the number of landowners to two – the Department of Defence and the Darwin City Council. Defence is prepared to lease its land to an appropriate management body. It is likely that the Darwin City Council will become the management body for the area.

### **Rural Living Blocks between Trower Road and McMillans Road**

The Committee has taken an interest in these blocks which have been subject to a number of development and rezoning applications. The Department of Lands, Planning and Environment ran a workshop on the Rapid Creek Land Use Objective process for this area with the committee. The Committee produced a submission to the process which stressed the integral role this section of the creek plays as it connects the tidal and freshwater systems. Key issues addressed were water quality, altered drainage, intensity of land use, retention of natural vegetation, weeds, fire and access. It also recommended that guidelines be established to manage lands inundated during floods. The Land Use Objectives were declared in March 2000. They have provision for protection of the river corridor and areas of natural bushland and do not support high intensity development in the area. At the time they were declared the creek corridor was rezoned to O3 Conservation.

### **Beneficial Uses**

In their submission to the Land Use Objectives process the Committee requested that the Beneficial Uses of "Aquatic Ecosystem Protection" and "Recreation and Aesthetics" be extended to include the freshwater reaches of the creek. Following a public consultation process in late 1999 these Beneficial Uses were declared in January 2000.

### **Rezoning of Section 4294**

The Committee wrote a submission objecting to the rezoning of this section from O1 (Open Space) to Specific Use for the purpose of development generally in accordance with O2 (Organised Recreation). The area is on the corner of Henry Wrigley Drive and McMillans Road. The submission pointed out that the rezoning was inconsistent with specific sections of the Management Plan which recommend retaining this block in its natural state. The rezoning application was rejected by the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment.

### **Darwin International Airport**

Before the release of the Darwin International Airport Preliminary Draft Masterplan and Environment Strategy the airport and its consultant carried out a series of workshops about the plan. The Committee was involved in these and prepared a brief submission focussing on the Rapid Creek Management Plan. The Committee also met with the independent Airport Environment Officer and he explained his role under the Commonwealth Airports Act. As a result of the workshops, the airport commissioned additional studies into flora, fauna, hydrology and traffic.

When the Darwin International Airport Preliminary Draft Masterplan and Environment Strategy were released in February 1999 the Committee prepared an extensive submission which was sent to the airport's consultant and the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment and Heritage. The submission specifically addressed concerns in relation to water quality and monitoring, creek stability, erosion, flooding, vegetation management, habitat conservation and weed and fire management. The Commonwealth Minister for Transport and Regional Services endorsed the final Darwin International Airport Masterplan and Environment Strategy in September 1999. Some of the Committee's concerns were addressed in this document.

## **APPENDIX: SUMMARY OF ISSUES ADDRESSED IN CATCHMENT STRATEGIES IN THE RAPID CREEK MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **Water Management**

- Information and Management Advice
- Water Quality
- Creek Stability
- Erosion Control
- Flooding

### **Habitat Conservation**

- Vegetation Management
- On Defence land
- Fire Management
- Nursery and Seed Bank
- Public Information
- Fauna Study

### **Recreation and Access**

- The Gurumbai Centre
- Marrara Swamp
- RAAF Base (between Marrara Swamp and Flood Mitigation Weir)
- Monsoon Rainforest
- Darwin Water Gardens
- Local Reserves
- Casuarina Coastal Reserve
- Play Equipment
- Access

### **Landscape Character**

- Native Vegetation
- Entrances and Road Crossings
- Street Planting
- Visual Appreciation

### **Open Space Planning and Management**

- Planning Structure and Land Use Objectives
- Land Ownership
- Redevelopment of Existing Properties
- Rapid Creek Park

### **Community Liaison**

- Emergency Contact Officer
- Interpretation and Information
- Education Resource
- Further Historical Investigation