



Coastal eco warriors



Project Title

The Capes Volunteer Team

Project Coordinator

Hayley Rolfe

Team Leader

Nicole Lincoln

Project Duration

2011 ongoing

Stakeholders & Funding

Caring for our Country,
South West Catchments Council (SWCC),
Shire of Augusta Margaret River and
Cape to Cape Catchments Group
gave 'in kind' support.

Beneficiaries

Seven community groups,
the community, The Department of
Environment and Conservation (DEC),
The Shire of Augusta Margaret River,
The Shire of Busselton.

*Photo Left by Alistair Song
All other photos by Nicole Lincoln*

Active coastal conservation from Dunsborough to Augusta

Attacking weeds, planting trees and maintaining tracks are just some of the activities the Cape to Cape Catchments Group's Capes Volunteer Team might be involved in each week. Known locally as the 'Eco Warriors', the team was formed to assist community land and coastcare groups in the south west of Western Australia.

"The idea to create a volunteer team came from people asking us how they could help by volunteering. But we had no formal way of supporting or organising volunteers," explains Project Coordinator, Hayley Rolfe, from the Cape to Cape Catchments Group. "In 2008 we arranged our first round of funding through Lotterywest and put together a project based on a 'British Trust for Conservation Volunteers' model where a volunteer team is created and then 'farmed' out where necessary to assist other groups. With the Caring for our Country funding in 2011 we have a team of volunteers working with seven community groups involved in coastal projects

and on-ground work taking place at approximately 26 different sites from Dunsborough to Augusta," explains Ms Rolfe.

Seaside hotspots protected

There is always conservation work to be done on the coast. This high energy environment experiences pressures from wind and waves as well as impacts from visitation. By supporting smaller community groups already engaged in coastcare work, areas can be protected more significantly, thus improving the coastal hotspots.





“Shameless self promotion ensures that the word for volunteers is spread via local newspapers, extensive email lists and various other voluntary publications and newsletters,” explains Ms Rolfe.

Volunteers meet every Thursday morning at the Community Resource Centre in Margaret River and are transported to project sites. Each week approximately six volunteers and a Team Leader might work on any of the following activities:-

- Restoration activities including erosion control and re-vegetation.
- Formalising access routes to the beaches.
- Weed control.
- Marine debris and beach clean ups – where rubbish is also analysed to find out what it is and where it comes from.
- Seed collection.
- Possum monitoring.

The volunteer pipeline

The need to source funds and create this project was two-fold:

“Firstly, we needed to establish a network of volunteers to support the very small community groups already operating in the area. We needed to develop work plans, based on six month schedules provided by the groups themselves which detail what they would like to achieve,” explains Ms Rolfe. “Secondly, we needed to provide an organised, safe, fun experience for our volunteers so they would keep coming back.”

To function well, the Capes Volunteer Team needs a regular supply of volunteers and in this respect a paid supervisor is a necessity, not only in an organizational capacity but also to ensure that everyone understands the tasks at hand, what they are doing and why. Considerations such as insurance and first aid training are essential to the safe function of the team.

“Funding for a team leader is an essential part of the project. Without supervision, volunteers would not have insurance cover and the team couldn’t function. Without a regular team of volunteers our community groups would have to get by with an irregular supply of helpers. Our volunteers are a community resource and they help the area enormously,” says Ms Rolfe.

Coastcare groups supported

Funding has meant that seven community groups are now supported with a reliable stable of volunteers. These groups are:-

1. Dunsborough Coastal Landcare
2. Toby Inlet Catchment Group
3. Yallingup LCDC
4. Gracetown Progress Association
5. Margaret River Coastal Residents
6. Friends of Redgate Beach
7. Friends of Hardy Inlet

Impact of the project

Supporting community groups on the coast and engaging the community in coastal protection has meant that local people, as well as visitors can be involved in coastal rehabilitation. They make a positive contribution to the natural environment, take some ownership of their surroundings and learn new skills. "This project has had a significant impact on the environment because we have been able to engage volunteers in areas where they can make a difference, it's not an abstract hit or miss concept," says Ms Rolfe. Meeting Caring for our Country targets has been integral to this. "We are improving coastal hotspots, increasing coastal community engagement and participation as well as getting vital work achieved each week," she adds.

What has been learned?

A great deal has been learned from the funded activities; volunteers learn about damaging forces impacting the coastline, as well as what is needed to better manage those areas for the future. "From an organizational perspective, our learning has included refining our recruiting tools, for instance how to best engage volunteers and then how to keep them engaged. We also learn from the community groups we support ... what their coastal issues are and what they need in a practical way to protect them," says Ms Rolfe. "We've

learnt that volunteers are not a static commodity, so we would like to spend more time recruiting volunteers, as well as understanding their needs in order to retain them."

Getting the message out there

The next step will be to broaden the team's horizons by engaging them in biodiversity protection activities, possibly further up in the catchment within priority reserves. Training volunteers is also seen as a future priority in order to increase and diversify the skills.

In a larger sense, this project has ongoing benefits for the coast and the community groups that care for it. "Volunteering fosters a sense of stewardship and ownership of our natural resources. People are more likely to tell other people about the importance of the area and do things themselves to protect it, and that's important," says Ms Rolfe.

Firing on all cylinders for the future

"We'd like to ensure the team is maintained and we'll be putting effort into recruiting volunteers. We'd like to work with tourism operations and involve more visitors – to promote eco tourism. We'd like to keep our skills broad and make sure that volunteers are given different things to do to and keep having a great time." adds Ms Rolfe.





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This case study can be viewed online at
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