

Lord of the Weeds



Romaine Reserve, Burnie



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The Studied Area

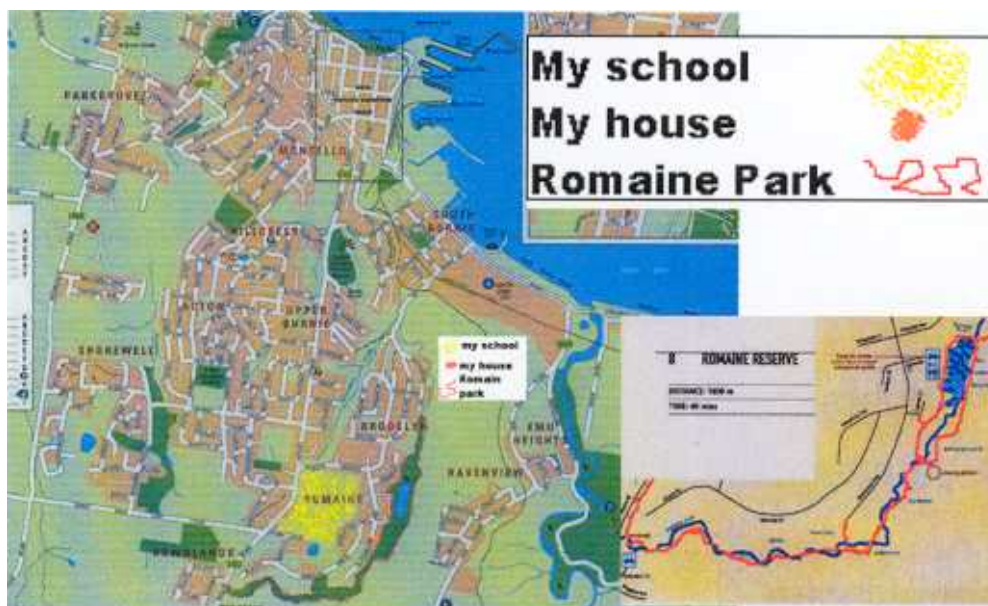
The area I am studying is a reserve in a residential area of Burnie, Tasmania. It is a sclerophyll forest. It has a creek going the whole length with a dam at the bottom end which holds habitat for a variety of wet land birds, fish and a platypus. There is a barbeque, playground and walking track which follows the creek in amongst the forest. This area is habitat to the rare Burnie Burrowing Crayfish which is only found in a couple of areas around Burnie.

The Romaine Park is home to a lot of native species-from platypus to echidnas, green parrots, kookaburras and cockatoos. It also has wallabies, potoroos and possums to name most of the fauna. It has a variety of flora ranging from gum trees to man ferns to wattle.

Getting rid of the weeds would make a better habitat for the animals as well as letting the native plants grow more freely. It should also attract more tourists.

The main reason weeds have become so common in this area is there has not been much effort to stop them. The council and Greening Australia spend a few weeks a year in the park but they concentrate their resources on planting more trees not thinning out the weeds. Another thing I have observed is that one of the plants they have planted a lot of is the Kangaroo Apple which is a declared toxic weed on the main land. Although it is not yet declared here, you would think they would avoid it and stop it taking over here too.

The park is in our community and right over my back fence. So if visitors visit the area and see how the weeds are taking over they will probably get the idea that the local community does not care which is not true.



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Weed Identification

The weeds I have identified and decided to work on are: blackberry, gorse, scotch thistle, bracken fern and the cumbungi (bull rush). Out of the five weeds I decided to work on, all of them had a rating of declared.

Declared weeds are weeds that have been declared to have the capacity to be a nuisance to people, livestock, crops or the environment. If the weeds were rated prohibited that would mean they would not be let into the State and dealt with if found. Last of all there are noxious weeds that will not be let into the State and be dealt with as first priority over prohibited weeds.

Blackberries (Rubus Fruticosus):

Blackberries are one of the main weeds in the area. They are taking over the native trees meaning they are also taking over the habitat for the native animals. They grow best in an average rainfall higher than 760mm making Burnie ideal. They spread by birds and animals that eat their fruit which consists of their seeds.



Gorse (Ulex Europaeus):

Gorse is another well distributed weed around the park. The big problems I can see with gorse are

- a: they can live up to thirty years
- b: Their seeds can spread so easily by birds, animals, people, vehicles, running water, etc.

Also once again our conditions suit its growing habits well.



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Scotch thistle (onopordum acanthium):

Scotch thistles are found around the grassed area of the park preferring to be close to the creek. Once again this plant prefers fertile soils, which makes the park great. They spread their seeds by wind and by dropping them, they then can then attach themselves to people, vehicles, running water, etc. Another minus is it can grow back from its roots so if the plant is removed but not the roots it has a chance of growing back.



Bracken fern (Pteridium Esculentum):

The bracken fern is another main weed throughout the park since it will grow almost anywhere. It is very well established throughout the park making it a challenge to control. If left it will continue multiplying due to it's underground root system.



Cumbungi/Bull Rush (Typha Latifolia):

Cumbungi is up the top end of the park in the swampy sections. Once the conditions are right the roots of the colony allow it to multiply. It spreads by the fluffy, feathery seeds moving by the wind, water, etc.



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Controlling the identified weeds

Controlling Blackberries by herbicide:

1. Make sure you have correctly identified the weed as a blackberry
2. Get permission from the council first
3. Remember to wear appropriate clothing when using herbicides
4. In this area I suggest to use a metsulfuron-methyl (e.g. brush-off®)
5. Best applied late spring to autumn
6. Before using herbicide read label carefully for mixing instructions
7. Ensure the whole plant gets covered including the foliage and stems
8. After a few weeks give them another coat of herbicide if required
9. Plant native plants over top to prevent new growths popping through
10. Keep an eye on the area and remove any more blackberries that appear

Controlling Gorse by cut-stump treatment:

1. Make sure you have correctly identified the weed as gorse
2. Get permission from the council first
3. Remember to wear appropriate clothing when using herbicides
4. In this area I suggest to use a triclopyr (e.g. Garlon®)
5. Cut the main stem of the gorse off as close to the ground as possible
6. Before using herbicide read label carefully for mixing instructions
7. Paint the stump with herbicide immediately after cutting to make sure the mixture sinks in before the stump seals up
8. Come back to site in 12 months to spray any off shoots while they are still young
9. If at all possible try to not spread its seeds by getting its seeds caught on your clothing or vehicle

Controlling Scotch Thistle by herbicide:

1. Make sure you have correctly identified the weed as a scotch thistle
2. Get permission from the council first
3. Remember to wear appropriate clothing when using herbicides
4. In this area I suggest to use a triclopyr (e.g. garlon®)
5. Before using herbicide read label carefully for mixing instructions
6. Ensure the whole plant gets covered including the foliage and stems
7. Give them another coat of herbicide in a few weeks if required
8. Plant native plants over top to prevent new growths popping through
9. Keep an eye on the area and remove any more scotch thistles that appear
10. If at all possible try to not spread its seeds by getting its seeds caught on your clothing or vehicle

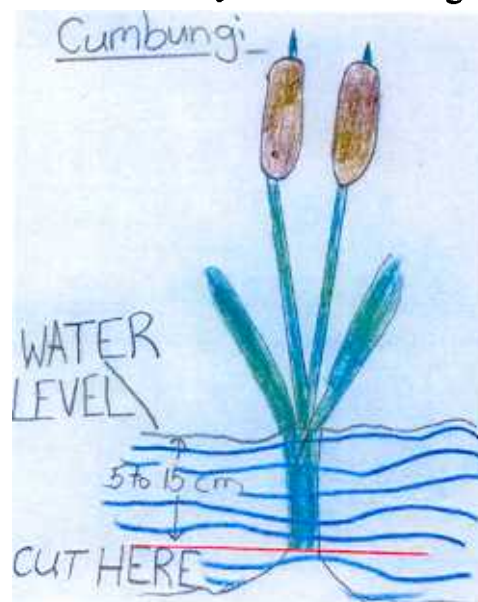
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Controlling bracken fern by cutting and herbicide

1. Make sure you have correctly identified the weed as a bracken fern
2. Get permission from the council first
3. Best time to cut is late spring to late summer
4. Cutting needs to occur about every four weeks with a total of five to seven cuts every season
5. When cutting get rid of as many fronds as possible especially dead ones that may block the herbicide reaching new shoots later on
6. Remember to wear appropriate clothing when using herbicides
7. In this area I suggest to use a mixture of metsulfuron-methyl (e.g. brush-off®) and glyphosate (e.g. trounce brush pack®)
8. Best applied six months after cutting
9. Before using herbicide read label carefully for mixing instructions
10. Ensure the whole plant gets covered including the foliage and stems
11. Give them another coat of herbicide after a few weeks if required
12. Keep an eye on the area and remove any more bracken fern that appears by the same method

Controlling Cumbungi by cutting:

1. Make sure you have correctly identified the weed as cumbungi
2. Get permission from the council first
3. Best cut starting in January and every 4-6 weeks following up until winter, repeat the process next season if necessary
4. Use a sharp cutting object to cut the stems off 5 to 15cm under the water suffocating them of oxygen
5. Keep an eye on the area and remove any more cumbungi that appear



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Benefits

If the work was put in, the weeds were removed, and native plants were replacing them, it would be an ideal native area, where tourists and visitors could get a really good idea of what Tasmania has to offer. It would be a lot more enjoyable for everyone. There would be no more dead bracken and no more blackberries trying to cross the tracks.

I tried to choose the options that would not take years to be put in place but would still work in with the surrounding environment. Large machinery would not be able to fit up the top end of the park without destroying more native plants and interrupting the wild life. In my opinion my strategy suggested is the most effective way of controlling the weeds without destroying anything else. The more weeds we can kill and the more native plants we replace them with, the better for all the native wild life and especially the rare Burnie Burrowing Crayfish. Providing those working on the weeds go back every 6 to 9 months to check on the area and deal with any weeds that have returned, it should be free of the identified weeds forever. I have only concentrated my work on five weeds so there will be other weeds I have not identified that have the potential of creating havoc. A similar controlling strategy will be required for these weeds. Romaine reserve if cleaned up will be a great recreational area for both our community and a great habitat for native animals.

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Photos of the Area

