

Grower partners needed for Mallee project

WAYNE BROWN

SANTFA and project partner Environments by Design are seeking grower partners for the next stage of the Restoring the Mallee Project, which in its first stage has planted native vegetation on 450ha on eight properties.

SANTFA and Environments by Design joined forces in 2012 to secure Federal funding for the Restoring the Mallee Project to help land owners in the Murray Mallee protect, enhance or increase the area of perennial native vegetation. This project, for a total area of 1,500ha, is funded through the Department of the Environment until 2017.

Establishment

Three establishment methods are being used on all the sites being renovated or revegetated as part of this project:

1. Natural regeneration. This is the cheapest approach but is an option only where there is existing native vegetation.
2. Direct seeding. Which costs 0.74-0.98 cents per established plant.
3. Seedling planting. This is the most expensive approach, costing around \$3-\$4.50 per established plant.

All sites are fenced to provide protection from possible hazards and maximise the chances of establishment and long-term survival.



DIRECT SEEDING IS A RELATIVELY LOW-COST OPTION BUT DIFFERENCES IN SEED SIZES AND CHARACTERISTICS MEAN SEEDS OF DIFFERENT SPECIES NEED TO BE TREATED AND POSITIONED DIFFERENTLY TO MAXIMISE ESTABLISHMENT. (PHOTO WAYNE BROWN)



SEEDLINGS OF NATIVE VEGETATION PLANTED ON A PROPERTY AT KARTE IN THE FIRST STAGE OF THE RESTORING THE MALLEE PROJECT. (PHOTO WAYNE BROWN)

Costs make direct seeding the preferred revegetation method. As with any seeding program, seed bed preparation and sowing depth are critical to the success of this approach.

As a general rule seeds are covered by half the diameter of the seed. This means:

- Fine seeds of species such as *Melaleuca*, *Eucalyptus* and *Leptoserium* are placed onto the soil surface and pressed in by a press wheel.
- Large, hard-coated seeds such as those of *Acacia* and *Dodonea* are pre-treated with hot water and positioned under the soil through the seed boot.
- Fluffy seeds of species such as *Allocasuarina* and *Callitris* are streamed onto the soil surface where the two tines on the seeder lightly cover the seed before they are pressed into the soil surface by a press wheel so they remain in place until there is a fall of rain.

Statistics

Last year the project funded:

- Planting of 50,000 native seedlings at Noora, Karte and Tailem Bend
- 314km of machine direct seeding using 500 grams per metre of a native seed mix (approximately 157kg of seed)

- 9.5km of fencing
- 400km of ripping for seedlings
- boom and spot spraying for weed control

- baiting warrens for rabbit control

In-kind contributions from participating farmers and others included:

- involvement in meetings/discussions
- farm planning
- providing suitable sites and agreeing to keeping the sites stock and pest free
- pest and weed control
- attending field days
- assisting with property inspections
- helping contractors carry out works
- monitoring
- seed collection assistance

Revegetation and vegetation restoration has occurred on a total of 450ha at Wunka, Noora, Karte and Tailem Bend and the treated sites are being monitored.

Each of the treated sites was identified as part of an overall property planning process, with the land owner providing the land for the initiative and involved in

decisions around the design and layout of the area to be revegetated.

Project sites must not be disturbed for at least 10 years but after this time there may be opportunities to harvest vegetation for specified purposes.

With funding available for another 1,050ha and the project scheduled to run until 2017, SANTFA members in the Mallee region interested in exploring options for native vegetation renewal or re-planting may be eligible for:

- Free site review
- Free planning
- Free fencing
- Free revegetation of site improvement options.

Each site is unique, with the approach taken tailored to suit the site, the local vegetation types and species, and the context of the farm of which it is part. The methods used may include all or some of the above options.

It is anticipated that another 350ha of native perennial vegetation will be protected, enhanced or replanted this year on properties around Peake, Pinnaroo and Noora.

Six growers have already committed to begin renovation or revegetation projects as part of the project this year but there is still time for others to apply.

A discussion and initial site inspection, at no cost to the land owner, is the first step to determining eligibility for involvement in this important project.

One of the objectives of this project, apart from the revegetation and restoration of suitable Murray Mallee farms, is to use local suppliers and products whenever we can. This includes local retailers, local contractors, fuels, food and accommodation, with the aim of providing economic benefits to these communities.

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