

Case study: Riverglade Wetlands Restoration Project, Tumut Shire

(Source: *Riverglade Wetlands Management Plan, 2003, Janet Mackay and Associates* and *Landcare online Riverglade Wetlands Project – text of which is provided by Tumt Shire Council*)

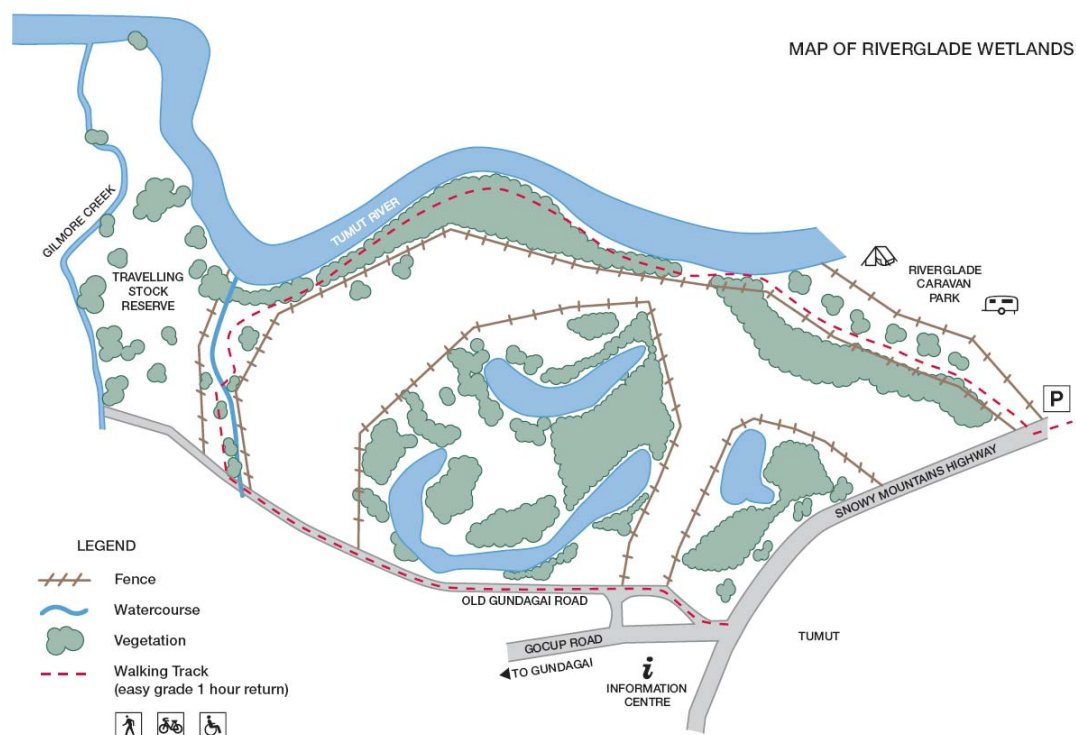
Project Site

The Riverglade Wetlands, located on the outskirts of the township of Tumut in the mid-Murrumbidgee catchment, was traditionally an important meeting place for the Wiradjuri people en route to the Snowy Mountains. Consisting of a series of lagoons bordered by the Tumut River to the east and Gilmore Creek to the north the wetland provided an important source of food such as birds, fish and reptiles. Physical evidence of the Wiradjuri's periodic occupation can be found in the wetlands area today.

In 1870 following European settlement of the region, the Riverglade area was dedicated as a permanent Common providing for its joint use by 'commoners' of the Tumut locality for agistment of stock and an area of recreation. Today, Tumut Shire Council is the Trustee of the Common.

In recent times the Indigenous community had lost connection with the 20 hectare site and the area faced a host of environmental challenges. The integrity and health of the wetland and surrounding public land was threatened by a loss and degradation of native vegetation, illegal dumping of rubbish, infestations with weeds including willows, osage orange and paspalum grass, cattle grazing and pugging of the foreshores and the river bank and a lack of natural flooding cycles.

Nearly 40 % of the town's unregulated stormwater also flowed into the natural wetland lagoons. This led to further degradation of the natural wetland ecosystem through the build up of sediments, the input of litter and other trash items and poor water quality.



Map source: Tumut Shire Council

The project

In the early nineties passionate local volunteers collated photographic and field records from the area and a rehabilitation project was started based on a *Wildlife Refuge Management Plan*. The compilation of a *Management Concept Report for Tumut River Common in 2001*, which was accepted by Council, paved the way for the start of a more comprehensive rehabilitation project in 2003.



Wetland lagoons suffered from high nutrient loads and sedimentation. Image Tumut Shire Council



Devoid of native vegetation, riverbanks were infested with weeds such as willows. Image Tumut Shire Council

At this time, Tumut Shire Council in partnership with local Landcare groups engaged a consultant to undertake an extensive consultation process with the local community and to develop the *Riverglade Wetlands Management Plan*. Interested stakeholders including council, landcarers, the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority, the indigenous community and individuals from the broader community formed Friends of the Riverglade Wetlands with the main objective to implement the new management plan.

In 2004 the group successfully received \$98,000 from the NSW government's Environmental Trust to rehabilitate the wetland, integrate the natural and cultural values of the site and raise awareness of the wetland environment.

Over the past four years and with extensive input from the local community the rehabilitation project has seen more than 5000 trees planted, a kilometre of fencing erected to exclude stock from the main lagoon, walking tracks and pedestrian bridges constructed to minimise disturbance to the wetland but still provide access for people around the site for passive recreation such as bird watching, significant indigenous sites such as scar trees protected and truckloads of willows and other invasive weeds removed.

In an effort to return the wetland to a more natural flooding regime, one third of Tumut's stormwater runoff has been filtered through a series of revegetated lagoons in the wetland before entering the Tumut River. This measure has succeeded in creating periods of flooding during winter months and drying over summer. Thus returning a more natural wetting and drying cycle to the wetland and improving the quality of run off into the river. Local schools have been engaged in a water quality monitoring program to provide education and ensure future generations of the community are engaged in the wetland environment.

The health of the Tumut River has been further enhanced via the improvement of the riparian zone through the removal of willows and revegetation with native trees and shrubs and the creation of a healthy buffer.



Fencing to control stock access and revegetation with native trees and shrubs have significantly improved the health of the wetland. Images Tumut Shire Council

The Indigenous community was involved in an archaeological survey which identified the cultural heritage sites. They found seven modified trees indicating Aboriginal camps in the area long before white settlement. The community then developed educational material to explain the significance of the area for Indigenous people.

This extensive collaborative project was recognised for its achievements by being awarded a regional and state landcare award and being shortlisted for the Australian landcare awards.

Today the wetland provides habitat for over 70 species of birds, some of which are internationally significant. Local Aboriginal guides regularly host cultural walks, local schools visit for environmental information days, and Bugwatch activities are frequent.



*Archaeological surveys identified significant sites of cultural heritage including scar trees.
Image Tumut Shire Council*



The local community strongly supported the project and helped plant over 5000 indigenous trees. Image Tumut Shire Council

The benefits

The project at Riverglade Wetlands has been achieved through the collaboration of many members of the Tumut community and has provided an important site for public education and enjoyment. The project has vastly improved the local environment and provided a natural buffer for the Tumut River which has further benefits for biodiversity in the region.

The social environment has developed too. The Friends of the Riverglade Wetlands group has succeeded in continually engaging a wide cross-section of the community in the rehabilitation process. Close friendships have developed between government employees, small business, the Indigenous and broader communities. The strong relationships between people have been a key part of the transformation of this now beautiful wetland habitat.