

BUSHCARE CODE

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| 1. Introduction..... | 3 |
| 1.1 What is Bush Regeneration?..... | 3 |
| 1.2 Definitions | 3 |
| 1.3 This document..... | 4 |
| 1.4 Training..... | 4 |
| 1.5 Communication | 4 |
| 1.6 Volunteers..... | 4 |
| 2. Terms of Agreement..... | 5 |
| 2.1 Volunteers are expected to:..... | 5 |
| 2.2 Volunteers can expect the following support from Council:..... | 5 |
| 3. Insurance | 5 |
| 3.1 Personal Accident Insurance..... | 5 |
| 3.2 Safety equipment | 6 |
| 3.3 Accidents | 6 |
| 3.4 Liabilities | 6 |
| 4. Bushcare Guidelines | 6 |
| 4.1 Registration procedure | 6 |
| 4.2 Training/Supervision..... | 7 |
| 4.3 Bushcare action plans..... | 7 |
| 4.4 Working..... | 7 |
| 4.5 Safety..... | 7 |
| 4.6 Plants..... | 7 |
| 4.7 Tools/Services..... | 8 |
| 4.8 Herbicide usage | 8 |
| 4.9 Debris removal..... | 8 |
| 5. Grievance procedure..... | 8 |
| 6. Acknowledgements | 9 |

1. Introduction

Canada Bay's natural environment is a particularly important part of the character and attractiveness of the area. It is under constant pressure from water runoff, weed invasion, and uncontrolled recreational use. Council plays a focal role in balancing the desire for an enhanced natural environment and everyday lifestyles.

Volunteer Bush Regenerators play an essential complementary role in Council's management of bushland. This role is primarily concerned with maintaining and increasing the health of bushland under Council's care, control and management. The Volunteer Bush Regeneration program is integrated with the works of Council staff, contractors and other community groups which all contribute to the management of bushland.

City of Canada Bay Council's Bushcare Program is designed to integrate the community with the management of urban bushland. Members of the community concerned with the declining health of their local bushland are able to play an active role in the bushland's rehabilitation.

Due to the importance of volunteers within Canada Bay, Council is committed to the long-term support of the program. Council supports the program by providing goods and services that are required for the restoration of natural bushland, namely, the necessary skills, information, support and direction to achieve success in their work.

The purpose of this document is to provide a set of guidelines that will enable Council to provide efficient and professional service to volunteers, whilst ensuring Council fulfils its legal obligations as Bushland Managers. It is essential that a professional program is designed to promote and protect both Council and the volunteers' responsibilities and rights, which guarantees a high standard of work while ensuring the smooth operation of the program.

There are several benefits to the community that stem from a Volunteer Bush Regeneration Program. These include the reversal of bushland degradation, the development of community spirit, a sense of pride and achievement, the conservation of biodiversity, raising community awareness, education and the improvement of aesthetic values related to natural bushland.

1.1 What is Bush Regeneration?

Bush regeneration is the practice of restoring bushland by focusing on reinstating and reinforcing natural ongoing regeneration processes (Australian Association of Bush Regenerators). Each volunteer group aims to rehabilitate the bush from a weed infested or otherwise degraded plant community to a healthy community composed of locally occurring native plants. Bush regeneration programs are long term commitments that require the development of a variety of skills, concepts and techniques. These cannot be obtained overnight; they are developed through a combination of learning, research and observation. Bush regeneration is not just weed removal; it is an integrated approach that encourages the bush to 'bounce back' through natural processes. This approach must focus on many aspects of the environment such as habitat, drainage, weed sources and establishing native communities.

1.2 Definitions

- 1.2a Volunteer worker. A person who freely contributes their services without coercion, whose work attracts no financial reward and provides a service to the community;
- 1.2b 'OH & S / Occupational Health and Safety. Refers to safe working methods when carrying out bush regeneration activities;
- 1.2c 'Staff '. Council staff that liaise with bush regeneration volunteers will be from the Conservation and Land Management or the Catchment Management sections. Volunteer trainers employed by Council are also included in this group;
- 1.2d Council. i.e. City of Canada Bay Council.

1.3 This document

This document sets out guidelines which apply equally to all registered Bushcare volunteers.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and direction to volunteers so that they can safely achieve quality results and personal satisfaction while fulfilling legislative requirements.

Council recognises that all sites must be dealt with on their merits. The policy is flexible to account for site and group variations. This document will be reviewed annually and comments from volunteers and other members of the community are valued. Notification of the review will be advertised in Bayside Bushcare Newsletter.

1.4 Training

Council Bushcare staff supervise Bushcare Volunteers on each Bushcare site. Council will conduct compulsory induction training sessions for all members of the program. All Bushcare Volunteers should complete the TAFE module Bushcare Essentials which can be organised through Council Bushcare Staff.

Further training programs are available through other council Bushcare Groups, Bushcare Volunteers are encouraged to attend these and other available training programs or courses.

All volunteers are encouraged to undergo external training in bush regeneration through organisations such as TAFE, Macquarie University and the National Trust.

Fees for these courses will be paid by Council as resources allow.

Relevant material held in Council offices, such as reference books, management reports etc. will be made available for volunteer bush regenerators to use in Council offices. Alternatively some material is for sale and some may be available on short term loan.

1.5 Communication

Council will produce a quarterly newsletter and volunteers are encouraged to become involved in its content and publishing.

All complaints, suggestions and concerns are to be directed to the Bushcare Coordinator or the Manager – Parks and Open Space.

Council will facilitate networking amongst volunteers in the form of workshops and open days.

Volunteers are encouraged to contribute and should feel free to ask questions and make suggestions regarding the progress of the Bushcare site.

1.6 Volunteers

Generally, new members to the Bushcare Program may only join existing registered Bushcare groups.

Formation of new groups will be considered by the Bushcare Coordinator depending upon one or more of the following:

1. The number of volunteers making application to form the new Bushcare group;
2. The willingness of the prospective volunteers to give a 5- year commitment to the proposed project;
3. The willingness of the prospective volunteers to work on an existing site for 6 months to gain experience; and/or
4. The prospects of success e.g. is the site very degraded or easy to restore?

There will be no discrimination on the basis of sex, age, race, disability, religion and sexuality against those who wish to join the program.

Volunteers do not receive any financial remuneration. Their reward is personal satisfaction, the protection and enhancement of the environment and the gratitude of Council and the community.

Volunteers groups are encouraged to work cooperatively, develop community spirit and a sense of ownership of the bushland.

The Bushcare Coordinator must be notified prior to any external arrangements or activities being undertaken by the volunteer group e.g. grant applications, sponsorship, assistance from private companies.

Volunteers are required to follow the directions of Council staff. Where this direction is not followed, Council may withdraw permission for that volunteer to work on public land.

For safety reasons, bushcare volunteers are to work under supervision from council Bushcare staff.

2. Terms of Agreement

2.1 Volunteers are expected to:

- Attend one compulsory induction / OH&S workshop;
- Adhere to a bushcare Action plan, and work under supervision;
- Be committed to their site by working regularly. On joining the program, volunteers should consider that in most cases, a minimum commitment of 5 years is required to achieve effective results in environmental restoration work;
- Co-operate with other volunteers and staff;
- Conform to legislation (Appendix A) and follow agreed procedures in this Code;
- Provide input as to what happens on site;
- Give feedback regarding Council's performance as bushland and volunteer managers; and
- Give notice prior to leaving the program, and return any issued tools e.g. bush regeneration pouch kit.

2.2 Volunteers can expect the following support from Council:

- Detailed and responsible direction and supervision from Council Bushcare staff;
- Training from qualified staff as available;
- Appropriate tools, resources and services to complete their work;
- Insurance cover while they are performing their volunteer duties;
- Support, encouragement and appreciation for their efforts;
- Placement in the type of work that best suits their skills and interests;
- Feedback regarding their performance as a bush regenerator;
- Information on decisions that may affect their position;
- Input as to what happens on site;
- Help with recruitment and community education;
- Assistance with application and management of environmental grants, as resources allow; and
- Regular newsletters and field days.

3. Insurance

3.1 Personal Accident Insurance

Registered voluntary workers are insured under Council's Personal Accident and Public Liability policies. Qualified persons are deemed to be those persons who have registered details with Council, including name, age, address and group name.

Volunteers aged under 10 years and over 90 years are not covered by this insurance and therefore cannot take part in this program. Volunteers under the age of 15 are to be supervised by an adult. Teenagers 15+ are welcome to join a group alone with written consent from a parent.

The provision of benefits is subject to Council's Insurance Company approving the claim.

3.2 Safety equipment

To ensure the safety of volunteers, Council will provide protective equipment appropriate for the tasks undertaken by volunteers. Once the safety equipment is supplied it must be worn at all times while undertaking the prescribed duties. Duties that require safety equipment must not be undertaken until appropriate equipment has been supplied. Council will supply first aid kits to the supervisors or group leaders of larger groups that meet regularly.

3.3 Accidents

All accidents must be reported as soon as possible to the Bushcare Coordinator (9911 6555) or the Manager – Parks and Open Space 9911 6555.

An accident report form should be filled out to aid any workers compensation claims which may arise. Report forms are available from the Bushcare Coordinator (9911 6555) or the Manager – Parks and Open Space 9911 6555.

Medical advice should be sought where there is a threat of infection.

Advice on first aid kits will be given at the compulsory induction / OH&S workshop.

3.4 Liabilities

- Volunteer's liability only extends to their negligence;
- Council must ensure that all volunteers are competent to do the task they are asked to undertake;
- Provided that volunteers are doing what has been agreed, Council's public liability policy will provide protection in almost every case. It is only where people wilfully disregard Council's requirements that they potentially expose themselves personally;
- Supervisors and volunteers must do their best at all times to protect the people around them in the workplace; and
- All volunteers working on land under Council's care and control must be registered members of the Bushcare Program.

4. Bushcare Guidelines

4.1 Registration procedure

Any members of the public may apply to join the program. This should be done by reading the Code of Practice, filling in the required information on the top sheet of the document and sending it back to Council in the envelope provided.

Attendance of one OH&S/induction session must then follow. These sessions are held regularly, and are advertised in the quarterly Bayside Bushcare Newsletter.

All new members to the program will be restricted to joining volunteer groups which are already established (See appendix B)

Recruitment of volunteers will be regulated by the Bushcare Coordinator, according to available resources.

'One off' visitors helping are acceptable as long as personal details have been received. Further involvement requires registration as outlined above.

Personal information collected by Council will not be released to external parties without prior consent.

Only volunteers that are regularly working as bush regenerators should be registered in the program.

Groups should nominate regular working times so they can meet with council bushcare staff working with the groups outlined in (Appendix B).

4.2 Training/Supervision

Training for volunteers will be provided by Council through staff or qualified contractors.

This training is required to ensure that community members are competent to do the work that they have volunteered to do. All volunteers are required to attend a Council induction session, covering the safe use of equipment and herbicides and Occupational Health and Safety requirements.

Volunteers are encouraged to undergo external training through organisations such as TAFE, Macquarie University and the National Trust. Council will pay the fees for these courses as resources allow.

Relevant material held in Council offices, such as reference books, management reports etc. will be made available for volunteer bush regenerators to use in Council offices. Alternatively some material may be available on short term loan.

4.3 Bushcare action plans

The Bushcare Coordinator will have a completed bushcare action plan for each site (see appendix C). Volunteers are encouraged to contribute to this process. The Aims and Objectives set down at this stage will seek to complement any existing plans of management for the bushland reserve. A copy will be kept by Council, and updated as necessary after site inspections.

Volunteers are encouraged to monitor their site by the use of fixed place photography, diary of works, fauna observed, general observations, monitoring of plant growth etc.

4.4 Working

All works carried out on Council managed bushland must comply with terms of this code and the relevant Acts as outlined in Appendix A.

Activity sign on sheets (see appendix D) should be filled out each work day. This will assist management of the program and highlight the value of the work done by volunteers.

Each site must be managed with the consideration of habitat preservation and fauna management. Council will provide specialist advice as necessary.

4.5 Safety

- All volunteers should avoid any unnecessary risk when working on site;
- No power tools (chainsaws, brushcutters, bobcats, loaders etc.) are to be used by volunteers;
- Safety equipment provided includes rubber gloves (for herbicide use), leather gloves, safety glasses, wide brimmed straw hats and sunscreen. Supervisors of larger groups will be supplied with 1st aid kits;
- Only Round Up Bioactive herbicide supplied by Council is to be used;
- Spraying of herbicide is not to be carried out by volunteers; and
- Any injuries must be recorded and reported as soon as possible after the event.

4.6 Plants

All plants must be positively identified prior to their removal.

Only locally sourced, indigenous plants are to be used by volunteers.

Each volunteer group is encouraged to collect site specific seed. Generally seed should be placed in a paper bag and labelled with the species, date of collection, name of the collector and specific location and forwarded to Council staff. For advice on how to collect seed, contact Council staff prior to collection.

4.7 Tools/Services

Services that are available from Council include mulch delivery, rubbish removal, the supply of native plants, signage, supervision and training.

Tools that are supplied will include loppers, bushsaws, tool pouches, herbicide (Round Up Bioactive only), bags, PVC gloves, leather gloves, kneepads, eye protectors.

All tools provided remain the property of Council and should be returned if a volunteer leaves the program.

4.8 Herbicide usage

Herbicide use is to be kept to an absolute minimum. Where possible non chemical weed control is to be used.

Roundup Bioactive herbicide supplied by Council is to be used. SWMS is to be followed at all times.

Volunteers may choose not to use herbicide.

A Material Safety Data Sheet will be supplied with containers of herbicide. This must be made readily available on site when herbicide is used.

The product label and Council trainer directions must be followed at all times.

All herbicide is to be stored in the standard labelled producer's container, and stored as per the registered label.

Spraying of herbicide is not to be carried out by volunteers.

Council staff may choose not to issue herbicide to volunteers if it is being used unsafely or inappropriately.

4.9 Debris removal

Where possible, cleared weeds that won't regrow (without seeds or bulbs) should be left on site. Please ask staff if you are unsure on this point.

Small branches mulch down quickly and larger branches should be used for bank stabilisation, erosion control, habitat and for purposes such as track marking or defining boundaries.

All weed propagules (seed, tubers, corms) should be placed in bags for collection.

5. Grievance procedure

If a volunteer has a grievance about any aspect of their tasks, other volunteers or Council staff, the following process should be followed:

The volunteer(s) shall notify the supervisor, or other authorised officers of any grievance or dispute and the remedy sought, in writing.

A meeting shall be held between the volunteer(s) and the supervisor to discuss the grievance or dispute and the remedy sought within two working days of notification.

If the matter remains unresolved, the volunteer(s) may request the matter be referred to the head of the department or other authorised officer for discussion. A further meeting between all parties shall be held as soon as practicable.

If the matter remains unresolved the General Manager shall provide the volunteer(s) with a written response. The response shall include the reasons for not implementing any proposed remedy.

Where the matter remains unresolved, it may be referred to the volunteers' representative and by the General Manager or other authorised officer to the Association for further discussion between the parties.

Reference: Local Government (State) Award 2004.

6. Acknowledgements

City of Canada Bay wishes to acknowledge Warringah Council, which granted permission for use of their Code for Bushcare Program (March 1997), as a basis for this guide.