

Statement by MCAV President Christa Treasure 26 January 2008

Here is some one sided propaganda from Parks Victoria, with unsubstantiated claims of cattle damage.

We, the **MCAV**, know **CATTLE DO NOT CAUSE DROUGHT OR FIRES.**

Following the Parks propaganda is an article from Stock and Land. A fact missing from the articles is that deer wallow in unstable ground or bogs.

We – **MCAV**, believe poor management practises caused the fire which in turn damaged the peat bogs.

Please read the below articles:

NOW NOT SO HORRIBLE

For those who haven't heard, there's a bog out in Pretty Valley called The Horror Bog, and with good reason....

When Alpine National Park staff came across it as part of the post 2003 fires assessment; it was a shocking example of what a combination of negative impacts can produce. As Elaine Thomas, who is based at Mt Beauty, explains, "This was obviously a spot where cattle would have come in the past because it is fed by a continuous spring. Their hooves had broken the sphagnum into islands, exposing the peat and allowing it to dry out. When the fires came through, the bog burned."

Given the amount of creative restoration work that's being carried out on bogs across the Alps, there was a fair amount of methodology to choose from. "However, compared to other systems, bogs are not well researched. They're complicated by their peat soils and complex hydrology so we're developing methods and testing restoration techniques, adapting these to suit each site."

In the case of the bog, formerly known as The Horror Bog (and that's a hint that this story has a happy ending), a group of alpine rehabilitators, ecologists and Parks Victoria staff gathered not only to put a range of treatments in place, but also to monitor the results. "We're working in partnership with Latrobe University's Centre for Applied Alpine ecology. Warwick Papst and his students worked with us to put various systems in place, and Henrik Wahren has designed and set up the ongoing monitoring."

The methods being used include; weirs, made with coir logs and Hessian-bagged wood chips wrapped in a geotextile material; hand broadcasting of seed, and plantings of sedge and grass seedlings; and mulches of Poa straw and jute. Control of weed species is also an important component of the rehabilitation work. Work took place in April this year and the happy results are already beginning to show. "The weirs appear to be doing what they were designed to do – to slow the water flow and help the peat to stay moist. The erosion on the slopes has been reduced by the mulching which has also helped reduce the effects of frost heave."

Of course the real winner here is the information which will be available through the monitoring. "We're looking at peat depth, ground height, vegetation species and where they occur. Together this will give us a three dimensional view of what the bog itself is doing. We need to know more than just what's happening to the works we've carried out. We'll also need to give it a new name..."

(Copied from Parks Vic website.)

STATUS OF MOSSBEDS BROUGHT IN TO QUESTION

THE OPPONENTS of Alpine grazing have sought to elevate the status of mossbeds to old growth forests and portray the cattle as trampling and trashing the ecology.

However, according to the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria the mossbeds form a small part of the alpine area and are flourishing.

The association said there were moss beds flourishing on private land in paddocks below the snowline and grazed year round by cattle.

To address the concerns it asked retired University of Melbourne professor Peter Attiwill to prepare a report.

According to MCAV past President Simon Turner, Professor Attiwill said there was no doubt as to the biological, ecological and hydrological importance of Sphagnum mossbeds, or bogs.

But Professor Attiwill told the MCAV they were relatively limited in extent; on the Bogong, High Plains for example, they might cover up to 10 per cent of the area, although he maintained this was an over estimate and more likely to be less than 5pc. *Stock and Land* was unable to contact Professor Attiwill to verify his comments.

Graziers of the high country, agree that if cattle enter a bog, they have an impact. However, they say any damage to bogs caused by cattle has not been great, and that the bogs have been used as icons of the high country, in just the same way that old-growth has been used in the fights over forests.

"Both mossbeds and old-growth forests come with the usual suite of adjectives – fragile, pristine, endangered and so forth," the MCAV said. "In the current city based conservation debates, one only has to use keywords like mossbeds, old growth forests, pristine, fragile, biodiversity and so forth to proclaim one self an ecological expert and to set one self upon a pedestal of great knowledge and virtuousness."

The MCAV acknowledges the importance of all ecosystems in the high country. However, it is concerned that the status of mossbeds have been overblown and has been used anecdotally rather than scientifically and factually.

The MCAV said mossbeds were living ecosystems and that they changed with time and disturbance from fire, grazing, alteration of water courses, alteration of drainage patterns and so forth. Throughout the range of public and private lands, some deteriorating mossbeds were found on both ungrazed and grazed areas. However most within both ungrazed and grazed areas were in fine condition.

The MCAV said it also saw that many mossbeds were burnt throughout the high country, some severely and some less so, in the 2003 fire.

Cattle avoided areas like mossbeds where the ground was unstable.

Furthermore, research had clearly demonstrated that the vegetation of the bogs was not preferred feed for cattle. Cattle preferred the open grassy communities, and spent only about 5pc of their time in and around the bogs, mainly to drink water, the association said.

Most of the bogs remained in excellent condition, professor Attiwill told the MCAV and had existed along with grazing of livestock for 170 years and yet their value was still proclaimed.

The MCAV said no comprehensive assessment of the condition of the mossbeds of the high country, as far as it knew (apart from some work on the Benison & Wellington Plains area) had been done.

"Given the iconic status of the mossbeds, it is inevitable that evidence for or against damage is selective and often anecdotal," it said. **DON STORY**

(Copied from *Stock and Land*)