

FRIENDS OF HODDLES CREEK NEWSLETTER



Thanks to Tracey the postie for delivering the FOHC Newsletter.

Vigilantes: Friends of Hoddles Creek on trial

A Hoddles Creek resident has been told that she should have nothing to do with the Friends of Hoddles Creek because they are a vigilante group, spying on residents.

Strong words, but are they true? What are the Friends of Hoddles Creek really up to? In this issue we take you behind the scenes to learn about their aims and their activities, so you can judge for yourself.



vigilante: member of a self-appointed body for the maintenance of order.

The Friends of Hoddles Creek (FOHC) group was formed in 1999, when the Victorian Government's Land for Wildlife suggested to some local residents that they

may like to form a 'friends' group. The idea sounded a good one to the dozen or so locals who attended and Friends of Hoddles Creek was born.

The group was incorporated in 2000 and FOHC is a member of the Upper Yarra District Environment Council (UYDEC), an umbrella group for environmental organisations in the Yarra Ranges.

Who are we?

FOHC members have a wide range of backgrounds and interests. Some members have businesses in Hoddles Creek, others are full-time residents who work elsewhere, while others are retirees. Some members have lived in Hoddles Creek for more than 30 years – others are relative newcomers, having lived here for only 5-10 years.

However, all members are united in their love for this special part of the Shire of Yarra Ranges and their desire to ensure that a balance between wilderness and development is preserved for future generations.

This does not mean that we are against all development in the area. We appreciate that there needs to be a balance.

So what do we do?

What we *don't* do is try to stop everyone doing anything at all to their properties.

However, we *do* believe that residents and landowners take on board the rules that apply when they move into an area. To people who say "It's my land, I'll do what I like with it", we say that, when you buy a car, that doesn't give you the right to drive it at 200 kilometres an hour, run red lights and ignore pedestrian crossings. You buy a car and use it subject to laws that are designed for the good of the community. Buying land is no different – owning it does not exempt you from playing by the rules and considering the rest of the community.

In the 8 years since our formation, we have been involved in only 3 protest campaigns

and two of these were at the request of groups of residents who sought our help.

Our most recent involvement was to support the move to stop conversion of Hoddles Creek Reserve into a 4WD training facility. This plan was opposed by a large number of residents, all of whom were angry that Parks Victoria had embarked on the project with no consultation of the local community and against many of their own guidelines. The plan was subsequently withdrawn.

Our own largest campaign was against Moran Logging, who purchased a 128 hectares of high environmental value Hoddles Creek forest in 2005, with the sole objective of clearfelling 99 hectares. The property is within a Rural Conservation Zone, contains significant plants and animals and has neighbors living less than 100 metres from the planned logging area.

Despite vigorous objection from FOHC (supported by the Environmental Defender's Office) and the local community (and rejection of the proposal by the Shire of Yarra Ranges), we finally lost the battle at VCAT, largely as a consequence of some bizarre inconsistencies in the local and State planning regulations. However, VCAT did place some limitations on the sites that could be logged, reducing the overall area.



Willing workers take a breather at the recent Hoddles Creek Primary School working bee.

As our secretary commented after the decision, "This is one of the highest quality areas of wildlife habitat in the Shire. There is something wrong with the system if the Shire and the residents don't want logging to proceed, and even the loggers acknowledge the quality of the area, but VCAT can still decide to allow it to be decimated." The Shire has called on the State Government to end logging in Rural Conservation Zones and has asked the Planning Minister, Rob Hulls,

to undertake an urgent review of VCAT powers and give greater weight to local planning policies.

Planting for the future

While these campaigns have been reported in the local press, most of our activities are much more low key. For example, we have adopted a stretch of stream frontage near the junction of Hoddles Creek and Blackleather Creek, cleaning up major blackberry and holly infestation. This is an ongoing project and the regrowth of native vegetation, including many ferns, is very rewarding. We plan to extend our streamfront activities over the coming years.

We have also embarked on a major planting project along Yellowgum Road, with the aim of providing a wildlife corridor between forested areas. The first sections of this planting are already growing well and later stages to complete the links are in progress. Our most recent planting project is alongside a section of Lusatia Park Road. All our planting projects have been assisted by the Shire (treeguards and mulch) and by local nurseries, several of whom have provided free plants.

The Hoddles Creek Primary School planting is another major project. Following the removal of a small pine plantation at the school, members of FOHC volunteered to help develop a revegetation plan for the school, to involve several distinct areas, including an outdoor classroom and a wetland area.

With the help of teachers, students and parents (plus more free plants, mulch and earthmoving), this project is progressing well. The most recent planting session took place recently (see photo) and planning of further stages of the project is well advanced.

What's the verdict?

So, are FOHC members vigilantes? Do we take the law into our own hands and ride roughshod over the wishes of other Hoddles Creek residents? Or, do we seek to strike a balance between preservation of native forest and bushland and legitimate development activities, campaigning only against those who have little regard for their neighbours and the broader community?

We'd like to know what you think. You can contact us by mail at PO Box 298, Yarra Junction, 3797, or by email to

fohc@provender.com.au. We would be happy to publish your comments in the next edition of the Newsletter.

Like to join FOHC?

If you care about Hoddles Creek and its natural beauty and environmental values, we're always on the lookout for new members. Membership is free, you get to meet other locals with similar values and we can always use extra hands for our working bees and other activities. Our contact details are on page 1.

Look out for our bumper Spring issue, with lots of hints, snippets and a competition. Coming to your letterbox in October.



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