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Focus on Friends

Ludlow Tuart Forest Restoration Group

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www.ludlowtuartforest.org.au

Summary

The Ludlow Tuart Forest Restoration Group (LTFRG) was established in 2018. We are a community group of volunteers who are facilitating support for the restoration, protection and maintenance of the Ludlow tuart forest, located between Busselton and Bunbury, south of Perth. The tuart forest tenure includes National Park, State Forest and the heritage listed Ludlow Forest Settlement. Early LTFRG achievements include the planting of over 75,000 tuart seedlings into state forest sites previously cleared for agricultural pursuits. The signing of a long-term lease ensures the protection and conservation of the heritage Ludlow Forest Settlement buildings and infrastructure. LTFRG have recently completed the Ludlow Master Plan providing direction for future heritage retention, development, tourism, employment and conservation. Income generated by this forest based multi-purpose venture will be invested in the continued restoration and maintenance of the adjoining tuart forest and the Ludlow Settlement heritage site and buildings.

Introduction

When people drive from Perth and Margaret River most do not realise that this area was once occupied by magnificent tuart trees (*Eucalyptus gomphocephala*) (Fig. 1). The tuart forest covered a coastal strip of 110,000 ha on the Swan Coastal Plain, from the Sabina River near Busselton to north of Perth. Only 3% remains today with the most extensive area being 1,925 ha within the local government areas of City of Busselton and Shire of Capel. The historic Ludlow Settlement is central to the area and straddles the Ludlow River (Fig. 2).

History of the tuart forest and Ludlow Settlement

This now remnant forest has a troubled, recent 190-year history following European settlement. Figure 1 and its caption accurately describe the majestic tuarts in their natural state.

In the first 100 years of European settlement the tuart forest was exploited for cattle grazing and clearing for agriculture. Tuart timber



Figure 1. 'Here we have a splendid view of a more than typical portion of the tuart forest which are only found in a comparatively narrow strip of calcareous country which lies along our coastline from Busselton to several miles north of Perth. Although the site of this view is so neat and park like it is true to nature and has not been improved artificially in any way.' Ednie-Brown F.L.S. F.R.H.S. (1896, p. 56). Photograph taken while camped at Lockville on 10 and 11 November 1896, reproduced with permission.

was recognised for its durability and resistance to abrasion; it was used for housing, fencing, hardwearing applications and fuel. In these early days timber harvesting throughout

the state's native forests was not constrained by government regulation; this commercial exploitation was very important for the development of Western Australia, with most timber

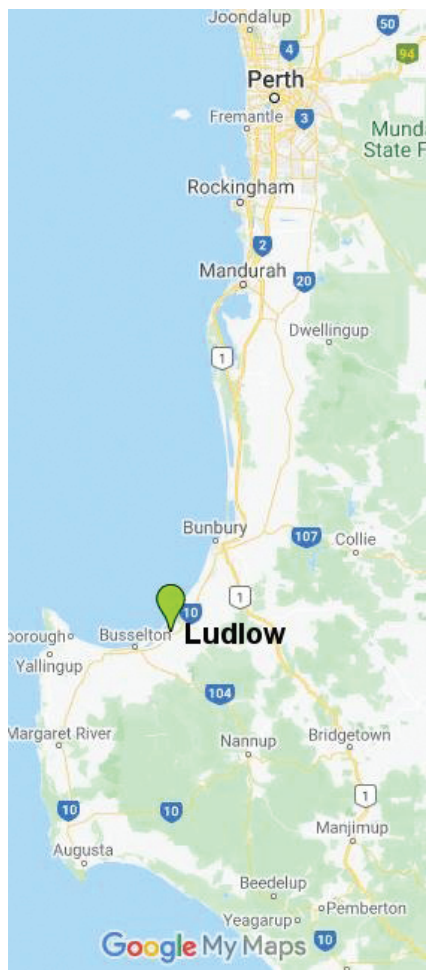


Figure 2. Location of the Ludlow Settlement.

being exported that support the developing economy.

In the 1890s Mr. J. Edney-Brown was appointed by the Woods & Forest Department (part of the Lands Department) to take charge of timber harvesting, but his untimely death left this position vacant for many more years. In 1910 Charles Lane-Poole was

appointed by the state government to introduce harvesting control and forest management. He was appointed Conservator of Forests in 1916 and wrote the Forests Act and regulations which were passed into law by government in 1918. The headquarters of the Forests Department was at Ludlow. A Forestry School was established there in 1921 where field staff were taught forest husbandry skills and techniques (Fig. 3). From the 1920s onwards Ludlow was also the centre of research into the introduction and establishment of softwood species (pines) and many of the resulting trial plantations are still evident in the area.

The Forests Department became a major employer in the southwest, and its headquarters moved from Ludlow to Perth. The Forestry School closed in 1927, and after various uses was destroyed by fire in 1979. In the 1940s a new sawmill was constructed at Ludlow to process tuart from the adjacent forest and later pines from the nearby plantations. This sawmill closed in the mid-1970s and is still extant (Heritage Council of Western Australia 2006).

The Ludlow-Wonnerup Area was entered on the Register of the National Estate in 1978. Whilst the focus of this registration was on the natural stands of tuart, the Ludlow Settlement was recognised as having special significance for the history of forestry in Western Australia. The Tuart Forest National Park was declared in 1987 and the Ludlow Forestry Mill and Settlement were heritage-listed (Heritage place number 15834) in 2006.

In 2014 the Conservation Commission of Western Australia prepared a Tuart Forest National Park management plan which emphasises



Figure 3. The Ludlow forestry school 1923. Photo: George Clover collection. Sourced from the collections of the State Library of Western Australia and reproduced with the permission of the Library Board of Western Australia reproduced with permission.

the value of the tuart forest and how the long-term conservation of tuart can be managed (Department of Parks and Wildlife 2014). Amongst other things, this national park includes vegetation types characterised by the presence of tuart, internationally significant Ramsar-listed wetlands, Noongar (Wardandi) cultural heritage sites of mythological, archaeological and spiritual significance, and the historic Ludlow Forestry Settlement.

Ludlow Tuart Forest Restoration Group

The Tuart Forest National Park management plan is an ambitious document with desired outcomes, management actions and key performance indicators, many of which have reporting requirements every 5 years. There is no mention, however,

of the budget required to achieve these aims.

The LTFRG, formed in 2018, is a group of volunteers who are assisting with some of the aims and objectives of the management plan. In particular the LTFRG are engaged in the restoration of state forest areas adjacent to Ludlow, together with the restoration of the heritage Ludlow Settlement buildings.

The objective of the LTFRG is [www.ludlowtuartforest.org.au/strategic-plan/] is:

To provide community support for the essential restoration, protection and ongoing maintenance of the iconic Ludlow tuart forest and the historic Ludlow Forestry Settlement for the benefit of future generations, biodiversity, tourism, education and research.

Values are:

- Encourage community involvement and ownership in all restoration projects.
- Respect past indigenous care for country and encourage future participation.
- Develop assets to provide for tourism, recreation, education, and employment.

Goals in relation to the tall tuart forest are:

- Restore within 45 years, the tall tuart forest canopy to provide for eco system dependent biodiversity to be returned. Conservation.
- Manage current threats, Human, animal, plant, insect and pathogen. Forest protection.
- Provide facilities to support, protect, breed and reintroduce dependent biodiversity, jobs and growth.
- Develop multifaceted tourism with links to estuary and RAMSAR listed wetlands bird sanctuary.

Goals in relation to the Ludlow Forestry Settlement are:

- Secure lease, restore power, water, security, communications and access.
- Provide a welcoming, safe, tuart forest-based education resource centre.
- Restore all buildings and infrastructure to reflect heritage and history.
- Repurpose internal spaces to allow commercial opportunity and employment.
- Provide for informative, physical, recreational tourism entry into the tuart forest.

- Renovate cottages to provide managed onsite amenity, camping and security.
- Establish opportunities to support commercial activity and employment.
- Provide resources, space and opportunity for aboriginal heritage, public education in traditions, arts, crafts, displays, commercial sales and employment.

This is an ambitious programme covering both the natural and built environment. To date LTFRG have obtained limited small funding grants and in-kind support from Federal and State Governments, local government, corporations, local businesses and individuals.

Achievements to date – the natural environment

The LTFRG aims to recreate a tuart forest ecosystem of not just the trees, but also the understorey plants and dependent biodiversity. There is no straight-forward recipe for this because tuart has often been difficult to re-establish on sites where it had once grown.

Funding in the form of individual and corporate tree sponsorship together with Federal Government and State Government small grants have been used to restore degraded lands on both sides of the Ludlow River. It has also been used to restore degraded areas where tuart once grew, but were cleared for agriculture. This land was repurchased by concerned government 100 years ago and leased back to farmers to continue cattle grazing during the desperate years of two world wars and the Great Depression. The cleared areas were planted to

pinus in the late 1950s and 60s. The final harvesting of the pinus in Lochart block was completed 20 years ago. It is this land provided by Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) that was prepared and planted back to tuart by LTFRG volunteers and school children over the past 3 years. (Figs 4, 5). In this case the revegetation has been very successful, but there is much to learn about how

to re-create a forest with its associated benefits of carbon capture, tourism, recreation, education, heritage, clean air and water management. A small area fenced by the Capel Land Conservation District Committee (LCDC) has shown the recovery of many of the native understorey species of the tuart forest following arum lily and herbivore control on the site (Fig. 6).



Figure 4. School children replanting tuart in 2019. Photo: Janet Wells.



Figure 5. 18 month old tuarts, hand planted, Central block in 2021. Photo: Des Donnelly.



Figure 6. This 10 ha area was fenced by the Capel LCDC to exclude herbivores, together with arum lily control. The area is predominantly scattered tuart over banksia woodland located within the Minninup forest block. The native plant understory visibly displays the conservation success. Photo: Des Donnelly

Achievements to date – the heritage buildings

The Ludlow Forestry Mill and Settlement contains industrial and residential buildings erected by the Forests Department which were common in the southwest. Some of the buildings were constructed in the 1920s, but most of the cottages, sawmill, workshop and associated buildings were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s. There are no other comparable intact sites in Western Australia (Heritage Council of Western Australia 2006).

Funding from local government and donors has been used to clear away accumulated rubbish, secure the site, make the buildings safe and provide on-site security. This work has been achieved by the management committee, community volunteer busy bees and with considerable help from Department of Corrections, Bunbury, Section 95 work release parolees. All of

this work is highly valued and a credit to all involved. An example of what has been accomplished is given below (Figs 7, 8). Some work, however, can only be done by approved tradespeople working to exacting heritage rules. There are also numerous statutory regulations that must be met resulting in considerable cost in both funding and time. Should volunteers be expected to fund these imposed costs to meet complex regulations?

Planning for a self-sufficient heritage/tourism site

This restoration project needs secure, on-going funding to fully restore the Ludlow site. The LTFRG have developed a Master Plan to guide restoration and development. The group has successfully negotiated a 20 year lease for the settlement area with DBCA. This agreement allows for investment to develop a tuart forest



Figure 7. Truck bay shed before restoration. The asbestos roof has been removed, and some timber structural members and weather boards replaced. Photo: Des Donnelly.

resource and education centre, short stay accommodation facilities, café, and function centre. Future plans also include the repurposing of existing buildings, native plant nursery and arboretum and provision of a children's nature playground and walking trails.

The LTFRG (Fig. 9) have achieved a huge amount in the past 4 years, and they have had fun along the way. Clear objectives for the protection and maintenance of the Ludlow tuart forest and the historic Ludlow Forest Settlement are in place, together with a clear vision of how these objectives can be further developed for the benefit of future generations and dependent forest biodiversity.

Thank you to our volunteers

The LTFRG volunteers and management team, together with the remnant threatened tuart forest biosphere and the heritage declared Ludlow Forest Settlement offer the following:

“Sincere thank you for your achievements to date”.

To all of our 620 financial members, our generous sponsors, community volunteers, in-kind supporters, section 95 parolees and supportive local and responsible state and local government agencies, we thank you for your concern, support and positive



Figure 8. Truck bay shed after restoration. The building has been straightened up, a new 285 m² zinc alum roof fitted together with a 110,000 L rainwater tank which provides potable water to the Ludlow Settlement. This work was carried out by Department of Corrections, Bunbury, Section 95 work release parolees, and the Ludlow Tuart Forest Restoration Group community volunteers. The project was funded by a City of Busselton community grant of \$19,000. Photo: Des Donnelly.



Figure 9. The Ludlow Tuart Forest Restoration Group raring to go on a busy bee. Like minded volunteer community members are needed now more than ever. To become a welcome member visit our web page to register on line. www.ludlowtuartforest.org.au Photo: Des Donnelly.

involvement. To the over 400 school children, their teachers and schools; thank you for your brilliant tuart seedling planting efforts. You will all be able to follow the future development of the renewed forest you have helped to recreate.

This recovery will take time. It is now up to us, on behalf of future generations, to accept full responsibility for forest ecosystem management for all values and expect elected governments to fully fund the restoration and silvicultural treatments which are crucially important for the health, vigour, conservation and protection of these now threatened, critically important, unique ecosystems. We urge interested parties to become involved and support LTFRG in practical forest and heritage restoration values.

Acknowledgements

I thank the librarian at the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions for providing Figure 1.

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