

KATOOMBA NATIVE PLANT NURSERY FACT SHEET

WILDPLANT RESCUE SERVICE HISTORY



The inception of Blue Mountains Wildplant Rescue Service

The Wildplant Rescue Service was formally established in 1994 as a community driven, not-for-profit organisation, based in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales.

It was a new and innovative concept for saving the natural plant heritage in urban areas of the Blue Mountains.

The concept evolved in January 1993 when Mikla Lewis, founder of the organisation, was working alone to rescue plants from a block of land destined for imminent development. It occurred to Mikla that if a group of people were working together, so many more plants could be saved.

Mikla had been instrumental in the establishment and management of the NSW Wildlife Information and Rescue Service (WIRES) nearly a decade earlier. She reasoned that the idea of a network of volunteers working to save native plants could be just as effective.

What is a wildplant?

Another founder member of the group, Wyn Jones, a naturalist then working for the National Parks and Wildlife Service, coined the word wildplant. Wyn - who was later to be involved with the discovery and scientific description of the ancient Wollemi Pine - created wildplant from the botanical equivalent of wildlife. Wyn and Mikla hoped the concept would encourage people to think about plants in much the same way they had come to care about animals.

Preserving a World Heritage area

The City of Blue Mountains, dubbed 'The city within a National Park', was uniquely positioned to benefit from the formation of a pilot Wildplant Rescue Service.

This recently listed World Heritage area, then home to more than 75,000 people, was under continuing pressure from more than 500 building permits issued every year, with most of the development affecting unspoiled native vegetation.



Block by block, the bushland nature of the Blue Mountains urban area was being slowly but steadily lost, replaced by exotic gardens which deprive native wildlife of food and habit and create huge weed problems in surrounding bushland and National Park.

Turning an idea into action

With their broad objective established, Mikla, as Project Manager, supported by a core group of volunteers began working to transform the dream into a reality. The Hon. Pam Allan, MP, who soon after became the NSW Minister for the Environment, officially launched the organisation on 19 February 1995.

From rescue to propagation

As the group evolved, the original idea of rescuing native plants developed into a bigger plan. The group became aware of the importance of protecting wildplant and wildlife communities in the Blue Mountains on a broader scale than solely rescuing condemned wildplants.

The collection of seeds and cuttings for propagation and on-selling to the local community was added to the concept. The facilities at Mount Tomah Botanic Garden were used for propagation of rescued seeds and cuttings, which were then cared for by group members in their own gardens.

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Establishment of the Nursery

In 1998 BMWRS opened its own nursery at the Clairvaux Community Centre and employed a part-time Nursery Coordinator. This has enabled BMWRS to take on contract native plant propagation and supply for several organisations, including local authorities, landscape contractors and bush regeneration groups.

The Nursery Today

Development on bushland, in the Blue Mountains, has slowed down. Although regular rescues are still carried out there are less than in the early days of the service. Therefore, a much larger proportion of BMWRS's activities are centred on

plant propagation from seeds and cuttings at the nursery. It has been decided therefore to give the nursery its own distinctive name - "Katoomba Native Plant Nursery".

In Conclusion

The success of BMWRS has proved that the concept is a good one that could be adapted and effectively used throughout New South Wales and beyond. In the same way that movements such as Landcare and Greening Australia have caught-on, it is hoped that Wildplant Rescue will also help to change the way Australians think about and treat their landscape.