WILSON INLET
CATCHMENT COMMITTEE

WICC News

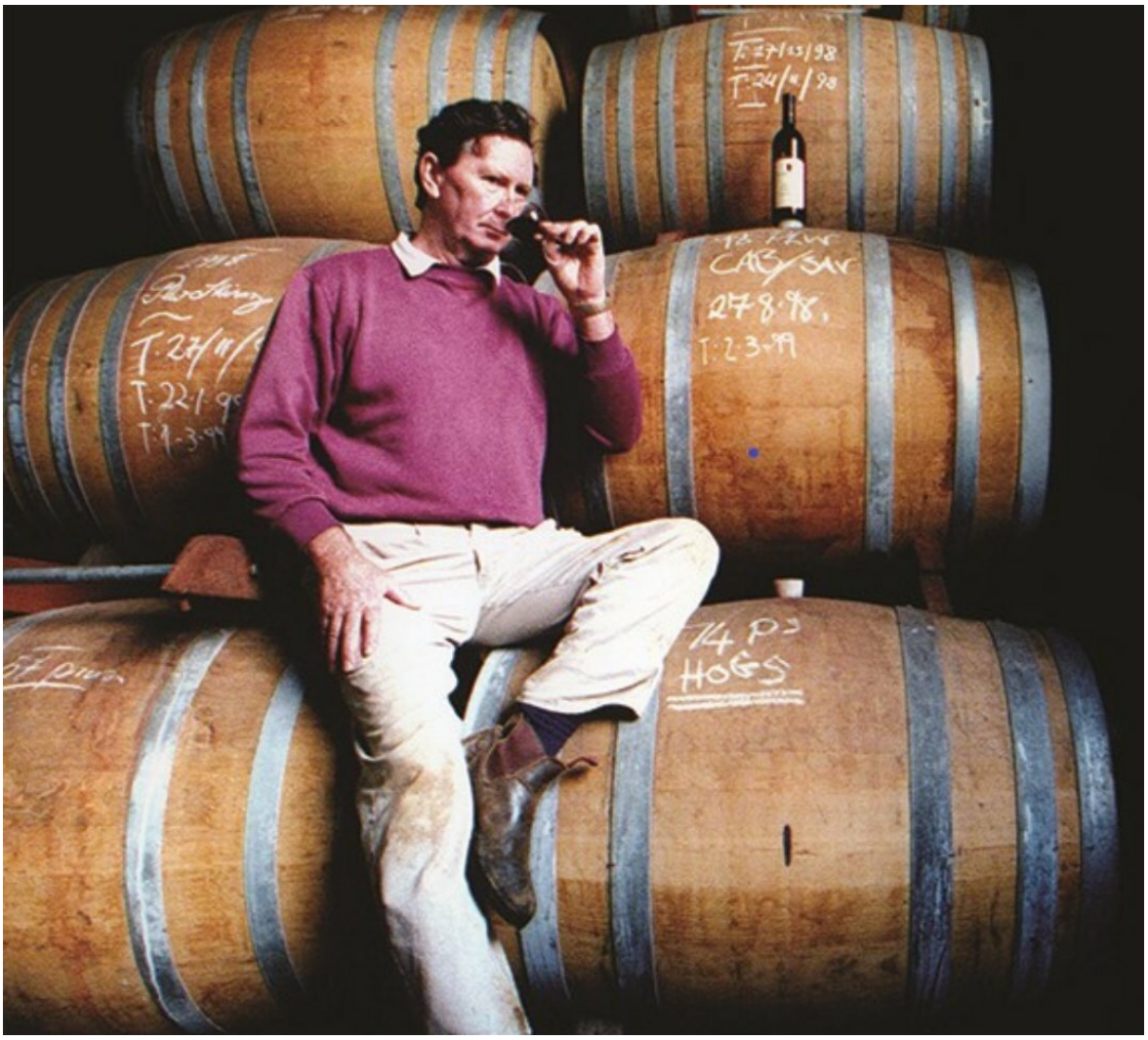
WICC Newsletter December 2021 - January 2022

Birak

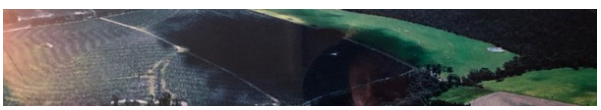
First summer dry and hot, burning time
Season of the Young

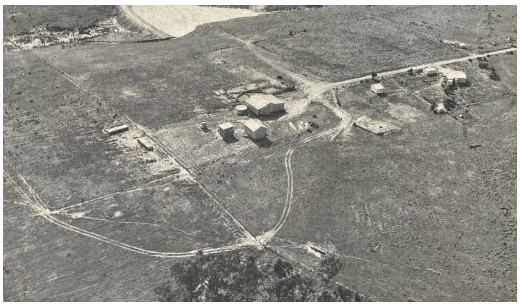
Farmer in focus

Tony Smith



Bouverie Farm





Bouverie Farm circa 1966

Bouverie Farm today

Local legend and pioneer of the Great Southern wine industry, Tony Smith, sadly passed away on the 4th of November. While Tony was instrumental in the establishment of our local wine industry, he was also a shining example of innovation demonstrated through his transformation of Bouverie Farm in Denbarker. We caught up with his son, Phil Smith, to learn more about how his father took a clear felled barren farm into a lush and productive jewel in the heart of our catchment.

WICC: Tell us a about the history of Bouverie Farm?

Phil: We moved over to Mt Barker (to Bouverie) in the second half of 1966. Much of the farm had been cleared in the late 1950's as a soldier settlement block with more cleared in the mid 1960's. Stock was run on the property including Pigs and Sheep, we changed over to Sheep and Cattle when we arrived. The challenges at that time were mainly financial as one of Australia's biggest export markets for agricultural products was the UK which had just turned to Europe for supply. The challenge was to find something that was economically viable and this was done more by trial and error than anything else.

Wine grapes were being trialled at Forest Hill nearby in 1966 so Tony decided to give that a go in 1968 as the initial reports were quite favourable even though no wine had yet been made. This was not an instant success either. Many errors were made including the sheep getting in to the vineyard one summer. The first crop did not come off until 1974, six years after the initial planting. These days you would expect to pick fruit after no more than three years!

Salinity wasn't considered a problem in the early years although salt seeps did begin to appear in some gullies, on discharge areas. Creek lines have always been saline late in the season as they begin to dry out. Careful dam site selection was always important to ensure the clay would hold water and the collected water wasn't salty. This became even more important later as he developed the Marron and Trout faming. The Trout relied on salt water and the Marron depended on fresh water so the water harvesting and storage had to be kept separate.

Contour banks across the farm harvest fresh water before it can mingle with the saline areas. This water is collected in one set of dams and then transferred by gravity into a larger dam as needed. And then into the Marron ponds. The dams built in the gullies harvested saline water and this water could be moved around using solar pumps from one collection point to the holding dams with the fish or into the shed with the holding tanks. Trees and reed banks were planted in discharge areas to use excess water and to manage eutrophication of the creek lines. A range of trees were planted including the fast growing Blue Gums and a slower growing species of Eucalyptus (Botryoides) which will be valuable furniture timber for the future. With the planting of the first vines, one thing lead to another. The industry seemed to develop fairly organically. We planted our vines, then we had to get the wine made. The first year wine was made at Sandalford in the Swan Valley but it didn't make sense to be trucking fruit all the way up there and it wasn't good for the fruit either. An old apple packing shed was for sale in Mt Barker (another victim of the UK's move to Europe!). We

old apple packing shed was for sale in Mt Barker (another victim of the UK's move to Europe!). We bought the shed for $5000! A key decision was to then employ a professional winemaker, the first one in WA outside of Houghton and Sandalford to do so. Once the winery was set up other vineyards began and wanted their wine made. At one stage we were making wine for nearly 20 different local brands!

It was then decided that the local industry needed a growers association to assist with marketing and to have a voice in industry politics. Tony was the Inaugural President, a title he held for many years. He went on to reform the state association and to be the state president. In the early 1980's there was a need for greater representation and a voice for small wine makers nationally as the national industry politics was dominated by the big wine companies. Tony took on this challenge and was involved in some very significant industry and tax reforms with the support from small winemakers throughout the country.

Tony retired in the 2000's and turned his attention back to the farm. A cousin in the UK who has the largest Trout farm in the country inspired him to do something more with the farm. Tony was wanting to do something to better manage the salinity and make use of the fresh water on the property without further contributing to catchment decline. The Trout and Marron farm was born out of this.

Tony was also known for his meticulous rainfall records he has been collecting for several decades. He has been supplying data for WICC News even throughout his illness. His wife Alison has kindly offered to continue with this tradition (she has moved the gauge a little closer to the house though :). Thank you Alison. Our thoughts are with you.

Wilson Inlet Growers Group

The Wilson Inlet Growers Group (WIGG) recently met to explore the best pasture species to suit our changing climate. We were fortunate to have retired meteorologist, Neil Bennet present on climate trends. This was followed by Paul Sanford, a pasture researcher from the Dept. of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) whom spoke on the latest research and trends in pasture species to suit our changing climate.

Meteorologist Neil Bennet

Neil told WIGG that the primary influence on our climate in our catchment is the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD). The Southern Annular Mode (SAM) and Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) can also influence our local climate but to a lesser degree. Neil said that a 'negative' IOD, SOI or SAM tend to drive an increase in rain. The trend towards a late break to our winter rains and more summer rains is likely to continue under our changing climate. Neil mentioned that land clearing is often more responsible for a reduced rainfall than climate change (at least for now). The reason is the trees cool the ground making rainfall more likely. They also transpire their moisture as part of the water cycle.

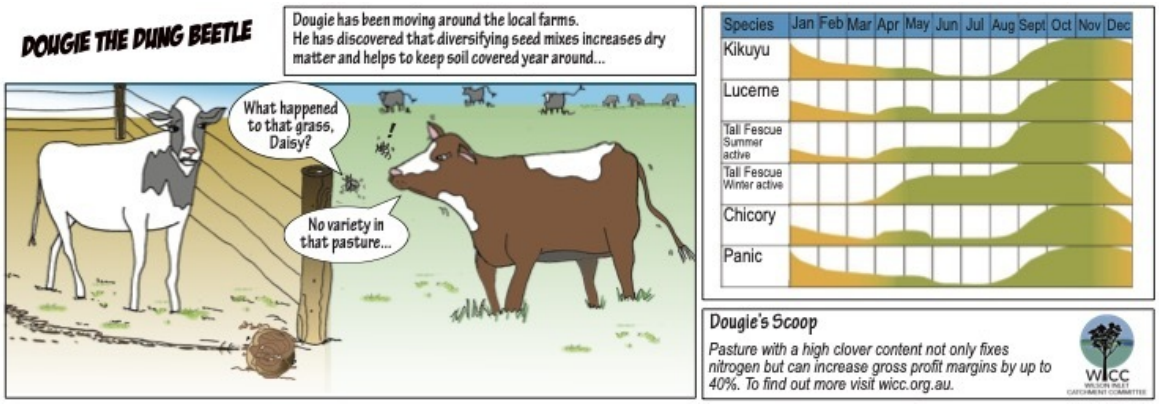
Paul spoke on maintaining a balance of annual and perennial based pastures. Perennials such as

kikuyu can take advantage of our intermittent summer rains (which have actually increased) meaning there is more fresh fodder for grazing stock across the summer months. While kikuyu does not have the nutritional value of an annual like rye grass, it serves a purpose in keeping your soil covered and retaining moisture in the summer months. Paul said his research suggests that a sheep grazer in Mt Barker receiving 656 mm of rain could expect to increase their gross profit margins by around 10% by adding 25% perennials to an annual pasture.

Legumes such as subterranean clover are also a winner. Kikuyu with a high clover content has been shown to increase gross profit margins by nearly 40% (12 ewes to the hectare). The clover is also a great way of naturally increasing soil nitrogen fertility. Typically clover fixes atmospheric nitrogen via its root nodules and when it dies or is eaten much of this nitrogen returns to the soil and becomes available to non-legumes such as grasses.

Diversifying your pasture species so there is green feed all year is the key to maximising your productivity and profit. This provides environmental benefits as well because there is pasture growing across more of the year which is able to take up soil nutrients and maximise the use of rainfall. Keeping your soil covered also reduces erosion (which can export Phosphorous to our inlet) and helps to maintain good soil biology.

WIGG is funded in part by the Western Australian Government's State Natural Resource Management Program.



New Grants

Honourable Alannah MacTiernan MLC and Jane Kelsbie MLA attended WICC's latest grower group meeting to announce that the state government will be funding the development of several dung beetle nurseries across the Wilson Inlet catchment area. WICC will be colonising winter/spring active dung beetles to help control nutrient export into our waterways. This is one of 3 successful WICC State NRM grants. The other 2 are for weed control in the Shire of Plantagenet and feral management.

Nullaki Update

Ringtails on the Nullaki

Western Ringtail Possum (Pseudocheirus occidentalis)

Trail camera photo of Western Ringtail Possum on the Nullaki

The critically endangered Western Ringtail Possum (WRP) has been captured on a trail camera within the Nullaki Peninsula. This is the first confirmed sighting of this species within the fenced enclosure and a testament to the feral control efforts on the peninsula given the confidence this little critter had to come down out of the trees (WRP are not known for this unlike their brush tailed cousins).

Not long after the formation of the then Nullaki Conservation Group in 2017, we started monitoring for cats and foxes using trail cameras as part of our feral animal control efforts. The array of cameras slowly increased and two years later we had 17 cameras set up at strategic locations contained within the feral management fence. We've also been conducting regular spotlighting nights focusing on areas containing suitable habitat for Western Ringtails.

There are three stronghold populations of this marsupial, Busselton/Margaret River, Manjimup and Albany. In 2018 we teamed up with Torbay Catchment Group who are also conducting WRP surveys in the area. We wanted to see how far north and west populations extend. On our spotlighting nights we regularly saw Brushtail Possums but no WRP's.

Photo by Bronte Van Helden

From our 17 cameras, which we check every 6 weeks, we have captured thousands of images, but never any images of ringtail possums. We did however capture images of many mammals including Quenda, Mardos, Brushtail Possums, Phascogales and recently an Echidna. Finally in late November, one of our cameras recorded an image of a ringtail possum not far from the Nullaki Boat Ramp. This is a great outcome. The possum was walking along the ground in a forested area containing high canopy Yate, Peppermint and Karri Trees. For our group this indicates just how important our fox baiting and cat trapping efforts are and proves what we thought, that they probably do live here. We figure it has been hard to detect them as there are so many impenetrable areas that are impossible to access on the Nullaki.

We believe this sighting makes Nullaki home to the most westerly recorded WRP in the Albany stronghold and we would hope this will lead to increased awareness and conservation efforts for this shy, herbivorous marsupial.

A messge from our Elders

Moodjah or The West Australian Xmas Tree - Nuytsia floribunda

Biologically, this species is the largest parasitic plant in the world as it attaches itself to the roots of other plants and sucks their sap. The species is related to mistletoe and is more accurately known as a hemi-parasite because, though they do feed off their hosts, they can also sustain themselves

through photosynthesis.

The species is known locally as Moodjar and is also a powerful symbol in Noongar culture. WICC asked Elder Vernice Gillies and her son, Minang man Larry Blight, about the meaning of the Moodjar.

Verrnice says, "The Moodjar or Christmas trees is an extremely important tree to the Noongar people. It is said that when a person passes away their spirit, tired after the effort of leaving the physical body, needs a place to rest and so it rests in the branches of the Moodjar. We Noongar people therefore do not interfere with the tree in any way. We don't touch the tree and are forbidden to pick the flowers. It is believed that would interfere with the journey that the wirin, or spirit needs to take to get to Kurranup or heaven after it has rested enough to move on.

When it begins to bloom as it is right now, it signifies warmer weather to come."

Nuytsia floribunda

Larry went on to say that the Aussie Christmas Tree is the largest mistletoe on earth and are parasitic and can be found only in the south-west corner of Western Australia

The Moodjar have small sweet tubers in the root system that can be eaten and is the only part of the tree that can be disturbed.

Karrak red tail cockatoo come to eat the blossoms they then can take your wirin to Kurranup. They are our weather barometer so if they flower early it will be an early summer."

Minang Man Larry Blight

Inlet Update

On 17 November approximately 90 community members were provided an update by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) on the condition of the inlet and proposed changed to the bar opening protocol.

While the inlet remains in a relatively healthy state it was acknowledged that opening the sand bar under the current sand bar protocol will become an increasing challenge in a drying climate. Currently the inlet must reach 0.7 meters Australian Height Datum (AHD) before an opening is considered. This has led to the non opening of the inlet on a few occasions.

There are a number of inlet assets which benefit from the opening of the sand bar. Following the opening the inlet height drops to sea level. This provides more habitat for shorebirds. It also allows for marine exchange which benefits our fish biodiversity as many species require marine access to breed. Estuarine opportunist such as pink snapper take advantage of openings using the inlet as a nursery. Our foreshore vegetation also benefits as prolonged inundation by saltwater following non openings has shown to kill fringing flora and retard recruitment of new flora.

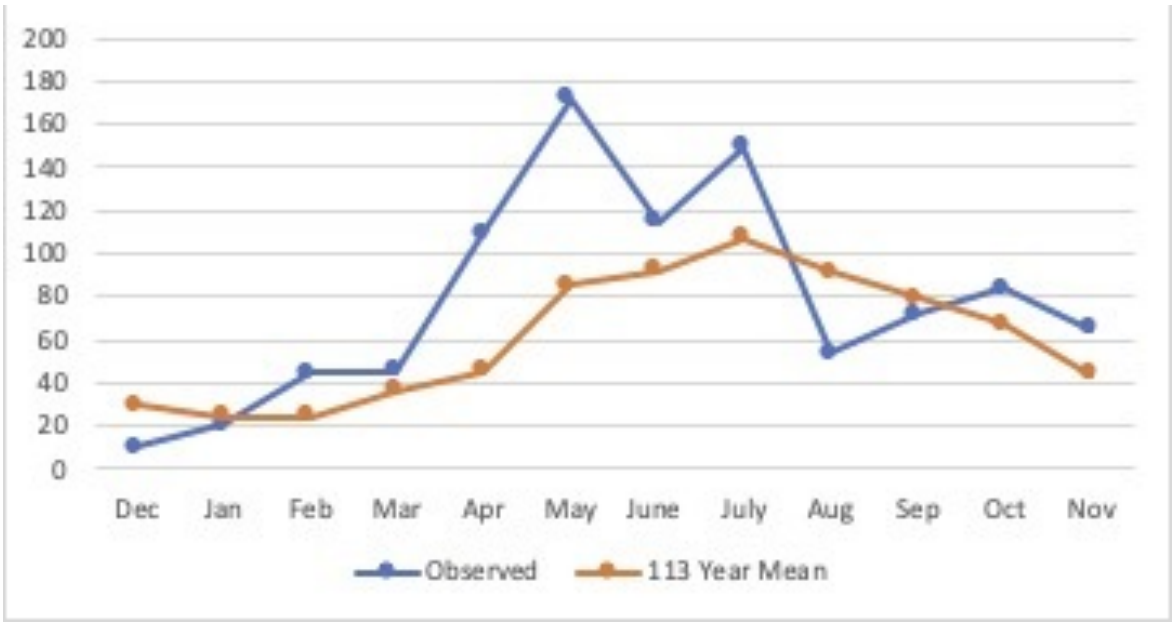
The proposed changes to the bar opening protocol will better allow for the opening of the inlet during dry years when the inlet height does not reach .7 meters AHD. The protocol will consider the implications that a lower opening will have on the seagrass, water quality and other assets.

Thank you to our guest speakers Elder Vernice Gillies, Malcolm Robb, Elke Reichwaldt, Mark Bailey, Shaun Ossinger, Peta Kelsie, Brett Ward.

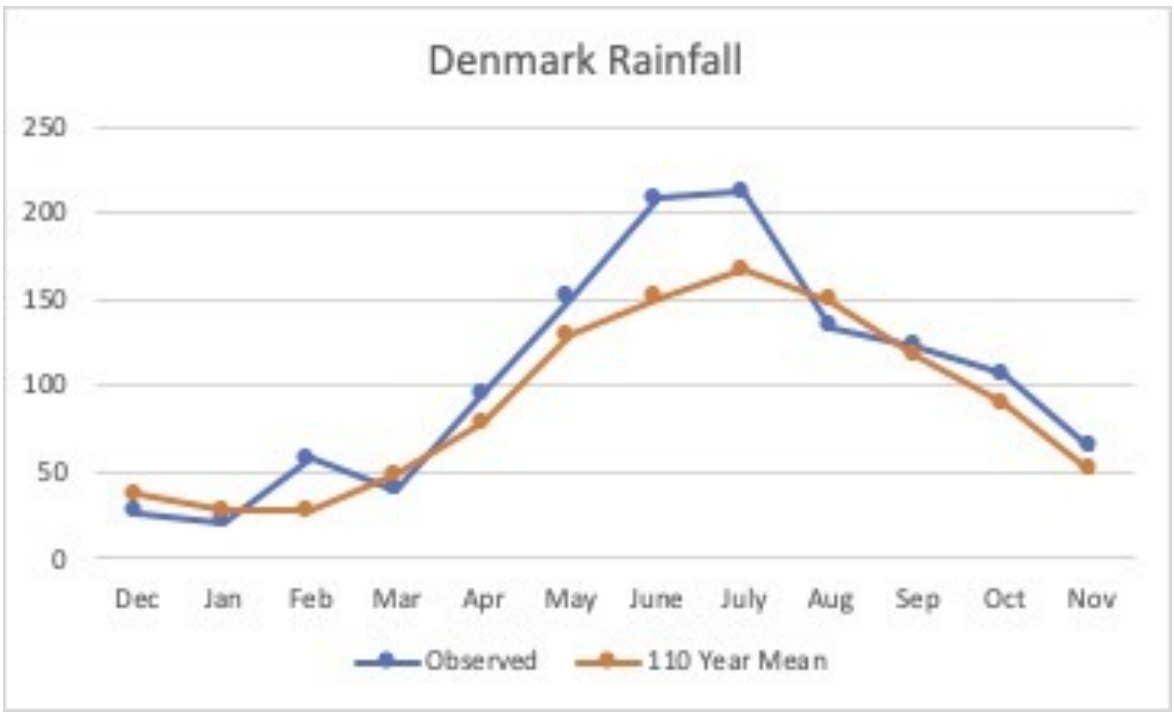
See the latest inlet monitoring date HERE

Rainfall Update

According to the Bureau of Meteorology this was the coolest spring for twenty years. For Western Australia, spring rainfall was 35% above the 1961-1990 average, making this the wettest spring since 2014. There is a likely chance of exceeding our median rainfall for the first half of December. The latter half of December and the month of January is looking dryer than the long term average.



data supplied by Tony and Alison Smith



data supplied by BoM

AGM Update

WICC recently held their annual AGM with guest speaker/entertainer Gary Muir from WOW Eco-cruises who provided an entertaining talk on everything from Darwin to legumes.

We are fortunate to have retained an excellent Board of Directors in Joann Gren (Chair), Greg Sounness (Deputy Chair), Steve Jones (Treasurer), Kylie Cook (Secretary), Mark McHenry, Jenny Brenton, David Rogers and Scott Wolfe

WICC would like to welcome Roger Seeney whom has joined the WICC board following his retirement from the Denmark Shire Council where he served also as the council representative to WICC.

Weeds in Focus

Birdsfoot Trefoils *(Lotus angustissimus)*

Birdsfoot Trefoils are sprawling herbs native to Europe that have become weeds along roadsides, in damp pastures, gardens and along creek lines. They flower in spring and summer with small yellow flowers 4-7mm long with their leaves divided into 5, often hairy, leaflets. Apart from hairiness, they are best distinguished by the length of their pods which are up to 1.4cm.

Control

Mowing to 5cm every 3 weeks provides reasonable control and may reduce seed production and

spread. Don't burn infested area as it will promote seed germination and will promote seedling establishment. Glyphosate is also not effective. Grazing provides little control and cultivation tends to make infestations worse but planting native trees and shrubs to increase the shade can help.

Herbicides provide the most effective control.

Grass dominant situations/small infestations: Use Picloram based products like Tordon.

Hand spraying: Use Logran or Lontrel in winter to early summer.

Around native vegetation: Use Logran or Lontrel. Metsulfuron also provides good control but but may damage young native species.

Help make a difference by supporting our projects!

DONATE

Your donation will go to where it is needed and could be used across these vital initiatives

catchment through invasive species controls, preservation of remnant native revegetation and weed control.

establish native vegetation, minimise erosion and strip nutrients.

assist landowners to implement environmentally sustainable practices that reduce nutrient loads in the catchment.

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