

Media Release

Date: Monday, 18 March, 2013

From: Friends of Mt Majura ParkCare Group (FoMM)

Subject: **The grazing impact of kangaroos:** A three year experiment.

Author and Contact: Ms Waltraud Pix, Group Coordinator

Email: admin@majura.org

The grazing impact of Kangaroos: A three year experiment

The results of a three year experiment by a local ParkCare group demonstrate that grazing pressure by kangaroos has serious consequences for the integrity of endangered grassy woodlands.

Since late 2009, with financial help from the ACT Government and the North Canberra Community Council, the Friends of Mt Majura conducted a simple public awareness project by recording vegetation change, and demonstrating the cause.

“We set up our *Explaining Change* project to gain a better understanding of the relative influence of kangaroos, rabbits, and season on the herbaceous ground layer in the reserve”, Ms Waltraud Pix, coordinator of the Friends of Mount Majura explains. “We fenced small grassland areas to exclude kangaroos and rabbits, kangaroos only, or none of the two herbivores and recorded the changes of the ground layer with repeat photography at fixed times of the year.”

“Our project began during a prolonged drought in 2009. We were astonished to observe how the lawn-like grass layer recovered as a response to removing grazing pressure. With three years of repeat photographic records of the seasonal changes, and the separate impacts of kangaroos and rabbits, the evidence is now conclusive. Our records demonstrate that kangaroo grazing is the problem. Even under the favourable rainfall conditions grazing induced changes of the ground layer persist,” says Ms Pix.

“Protecting Yellow-box-Red Gum grassy woodland” is the stated purpose in creating, and thus managing Mt Majura Nature Reserve (MMNR). But one factor, which strongly influences the protection of this grassy woodland – grazing by kangaroos, is not managed. This is to be regretted because the kangaroo species, the Eastern Grey, is abundant and is under no threat of extinction. In contrast, there are many small populations of plant and small animal species in MMNR that are locally rare, and whose habitat is repeatedly grazed bare.

Does it matter? Based on years of experience working within the Reserve, The Friends are convinced that it does matter. In particular, it is obvious that grazing by kangaroos is both heavy and unsustainable, because there are too many of them in the small remaining grassy woodlands. The herbaceous layer, the grasses and forbs, is repeatedly reduced to a lawn or a cover of unpalatable weeds. Consequently, a large unmanaged kangaroo population defeats the purpose of protecting the grassy woodland.

Ms Pix has grave concerns that overgrazing undermines volunteer and government efforts to restore degraded grassy woodland. "Ultimately large scale restoration projects are not sustainable when overgrazing hampers the natural regeneration and the reproductive cycle of plants. Overgrazed landscapes would require continuous planting or direct seeding, and expensive measures to protect the plantings. What is the use of investing into the protecting, improving and restoring endangered grassy woodlands if we ignore a key factor that causes the degradation?"

A time-lapse video of the 3 years repeat photography and explanatory background information is available at <http://majura.org/explaining-change/>.

FoMM published the following photographic essays

Grazing impact on ParkCare restoration work at a former stock camp at the Majura ridge at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/61627737@N03/sets/72157632823459049/>

Grazing impact on the ground cover and soil at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/61627737@N03/sets/72157631419900742/>

End of Media Release