

Weed Eradication Detector Dogs detect Alligator Weed at Woomargama, NSW



Part 1: Alligator weed - a serious problem

History – Alligator weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*) is believed to have been introduced to an artificial lake near Woomargama in the 1960s. By 1972, alligator weed had invaded over 2 acres, covering about 75% of the lake. An extensive survey was made along Mountain Creek approximately 20 miles downstream without any further infestations detected. This creek flows into the Billabong Creek, then to the Edward & Wakool Rivers, and eventually to the Murray River. Thus, eradication of alligator weed is a high priority at this site.

In 1975, a further inspection of Mountain Creek detected a new infestation approximately 1km downstream from the lake. No other infestations were found beyond this point.

Mechanical & chemical control has occurred at this site since it was first reported in 1970. Consecutive years of nil growth have also occurred – but these have been interrupted with years when alligator weed reappears more vigorously than before.



Mountain Creek Infestation in 2017

February 2017 – A routine site inspection for alligator weed in February around the lake found no plant growth. Mountain creek, however, had several large infestations downstream of the lake.

Control and human surveillance over the years has not eradicated this infestation. To eradicate alligator weed from this site we need to find every last plant fragment – and that’s where the Weed Eradication Detector Dogs (WEDD) come in to play.



Connor - weed eradication detector dog, indicating on target weed scent

Photo: Ann Jones ABC

Enter Connor and the WAP – Passing through the region in March 2017, after 3 extensive days undertaking Hawkweed surveys in the alpine areas, Connor and his handlers heard of the mass explosion of alligator weed and stopped in to scope the site, and plan a return visit.

As a component of an OEH project funded through the NSW Weeds Action Program (WAP) *Trialling NSW WEDD to detect new incursions of state prohibited weeds*, Connor was trained to detect alligator weed plant material from outside this region, but had not previously been to the site. To make sure he could detect the scent on site, a stem fragment was sourced from the creek and placed in the tree line away from the mass infestation. Connor was instructed to “find the weed” and was indicating (that he’d found it) on the stem fragment in minutes!

Outcome: Biosecurity risks on our high risk pathways are identified - so they can be eliminated.

Part 2: Connor – a serious dog on the hunt for a serious weed

July 2017 – Connor returned to the site with handler Ryan after the infestation was treated. Once managers were confident all plant material had been controlled, Connor surveyed the known infested area to check the success of control, and then continued downstream searching for outlier plants.

And Connor found alligator weed!



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*I can detect alligator weed. Call my people...
Woof!*

NSW
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