

Case Study: Regenerating Cool Temperate Rainforest

Karl and Rachel Russo, Woolamai

Areas of concern

- Erosion and landslips
- Water quality
- Aesthetic of the land



Action taken

- Spot spraying for planting preparation
- Planting out steep gullies and stream side

Benefits

- Increased biodiversity
- Shelter and food for native wildlife
- Erosion stabilised
- Aesthetically pleasing
- Better water quality

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Who:	Karl and Rachel Russo
Where:	Woolamai, in the Strzelecki foothills
Size:	100 acres approx.
Enterprise:	Personal use, possible future ecotourism
Soil:	Clay grey loam
Aspect:	Hilly property with many steep gullies.

History

Karl is unsure of the full history of the property, but said, "I believe it was very badly overcome with weeds about a decade ago. The previous owner Mick and current neighbour Ross spent a lot of time cleaning it up. Before this I think it was used for sheep farming (judging by a few skeletons deep in the valley!) and following this, it has more recently been used for cattle (beef) farming. Nobody has ever lived at the property. We're lucky that a lot of the hard work has been done in cleaning up the weeds. Now we can focus on filling it with trees and plants!"

Recreating the Landscape

When Karl and Rachel Russo bought 100 acres in Woolamai they saw an opportunity to rebuild the landscape, as close to its original form as possible. The land consists of very steep hills covered with deep hoof-holes from cattle and landslips of various sizes and intensity, too steep for farm machinery and ultimately useless for many other purposes. The Russos had never intended to farm the land anyway, they were armed with a vision of planting it out as cool temperate rainforest, and leaving it for the years to come to flourish into a beautiful natural area for wildlife and indigenous plant species to thrive.

The Motivation

The Russos are keen to bring much of the property back to what it was before the deforestation, "It's devastating to think about the amazing forest that was decimated." Karl said, "Towering trees and cool temperate rain forest deep down in the valley. We hope that in our lifetime, we see it regenerating and moving back towards what it once was."

The property is currently "barren, raw and wild", but Karl would like it to eventually be a beautiful place for his family to live. "We know that re-vegetating most of the property will significantly increase the beauty and liveability of the property, whilst being a huge positive for the environment and local wildlife." They would also like to help improve the soil quality and reduce erosion. 5-7 years ago, the previous owner did some revegetation work which has already brought some native animals back to the area, so Karl and Rachel are looking forward to seeing this on a larger scale over the coming years.



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The Project

This planting project was the biggest of its kind in the area for 20 years. With the help of Bass Coast Landcare Network, 200 Wonthaggi Secondary College year 9 students, Gippsland Intrepid Landcare, Melbourne Water staff, and the Green Army, 25,000 trees and shrubs were planted as the first stage in the massive project. The plants were supplied by a large indigenous nursery in Fish Creek, and were popped out of their hico trays and arranged into buckets, so that they would be planted randomly on the site.



Looking from one hill, across the gully to the other side, participants could see tens of thousands of spots sprayed in the grass, marking where each plant was to go. It was easy to see the massive scale of the project.

3 months later Bass Coast Landcare Network visited Karl and Rachel's property to see the growth of the plants, and were overall very happy with them. Next planting season will be another big one for the property, as will the one after that.

Looking Forward...

This is just the first stage of this massive planting. It is a very large project and will take multiple planting events and years of time, but eventually the Russo family and all involved hope to see something like the cool temperate rainforest that once stood on his property. Karl and Rachel hope in the future that they may be able to run a small Eco-Tourism business once the vegetation has grown.

