



Woodend Golf Club northwest of Melbourne has received local council funding to undertake a re-wilding project to enhance the course surrounds. Pictured is Woodend's signature par three 11th



# Re-wilding Woodend

*Kate Torgersen looks at the project to re-wild Woodend Golf Club northwest of Melbourne and the positive impact it will have on flora and fauna as well as the local community.*

**A**nnabel Sides is a resident in the Macedon Ranges north west of Melbourne who has a passion for future-proofing sport. During one of Victoria's many COVID-enforced lockdowns, Sides approached me to say the local council had a grant opportunity that would be perfect for golf courses within that shire. I knew straight away this could be a fantastic opportunity to showcase the key environmental benefits of golf.

Sides is founder of Green Planet Sport, a regenerative sport consultancy business that offers advice to create a clear path to climate action through the development of bespoke purpose projects, grant finding and grant-application writing. A childhood spent farming and a lifetime in sport has been the foundation

for Sides to establish the company. Her aim is for sport to be involved in tackling climate change and to build a better future for sport, children and the planet.

We have all witnessed the impact of the ongoing global pandemic on community sport. Throughout long lockdowns, the effects on the physical and mental health of golf club members and the wider community, in particular young people, has been significant.

It is hard to believe that as sport meets the challenge to 'build back better' post pandemic, that it is not the pandemic that will be the biggest challenge sport will face this decade. The biggest challenge will be climate change and the associated complexity of disruptions within our natural, social and economic ecosystems.

Adapting now to the challenges that courses and clubs will face ensures a future where they can continue to deliver play and manage the disruptions with less impact on financial security of the club, jobs, nature and the health and wellbeing of club members and the wider community.

This article aims to focus in on one action – re-wilding – that brings health to and fosters resilience in the land, waterways, wildlife and people that call their golf course home. If the world's golf courses focus some time on land use, then that's a positive for the planet.

### THE STORY SO FAR

Woodend Golf Club in the Macedon Ranges is taking up the challenge to future proof its course by embarking on a series of

activities to become more sustainable. In 2020 the Macedon Ranges Shire Council and consultants created the Woodend Region Climate Change Action Plan - Cool Changes 3442.

When the shire's community funding scheme was announced for 2020, Sides saw an opportunity for sports clubs to apply within the environment stream to pilot the region's first Green Sport Action plan. As a member of Woodend Golf Club, Sides contacted secretary Barney Hearnden, which led to the creation of a collaborative grant application titled, Future Proofing Woodend Golf Club: A Green Sports Action. The application was successful.

The club subsequently engaged Environmental Golf Solutions to create an environment master plan (EMP). Sides provided in-kind support for action planning, member surveys, partnership development and future proofing sport planning.

On paper this sounds formal, complex and somewhat overwhelming. In reality, the consultants take the complex elements away. They create the maps, the plans, the plant lists and the activity ideas for greatest impact. This leaves the golf community to focus on the project's bones that make long-term success possible: the partnership, collaboration and community building, the ideas sharing and learning, and the connections. Re-wilding is all about people looking after their place and all creatures great and small that call it home.

The project is now at the point where the course play zones (out-of-play, recovery and play) have been identified. Regeneration and protection zones have been earmarked and first-year pilot sites allocated and plants ordered. A mow and no-mow map is in design while nesting box type, number and locations are nearly finalised.



*While the Woodend re-wilding project is still in its infancy, it has captured the imagination of golf club members as well as receiving buy-in from local community groups*

Plots for Year 1 include the raised and tufted grassland to protect an out-of-play zone from ball entry, a pollinator plot, a weed-control region abutting grassland due for regeneration in Year 2 and several remnant grassland protection and enhancement sites.

Woodend course superintendent Grant Davies is one of the key players in the project to re-wild the course and its surrounds. Davies says the approach is to keep a balance of native vegetation and exotics. The course has a fairly even split between the two through the front of the course and to the back where most of the remnant vegetation and re-wilding opportunities lie.

Davies has a keen eye for species identification and his love of the golf course, the game and the environment will continue to see the project thrive under his leadership, supported by an army of passionate Woodend volunteers.

"Our revegetation project gives the club a chance to give back to the course that we play and love," Davies says. "With Kate's guidance and the engagement of local community and environmental groups, we will over time see significant cost and time savings with less time spent mowing rough and out-of-play areas. The environment will benefit from the native plantings and the increase in biodiversity. And



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The project is at the point where regeneration and protection zones around the course have been earmarked and first year pilot sites allocated and plants ordered

the course will become an even more beautiful place to be.”

Club secretary Hearnden adds: “During pandemic restrictions, over 80 per cent of our members surveyed missed the social interaction that being part of the club provides. This project offers another way for members and the wider community to be involved at the club.

### COMMUNITY SUPPORT

While club members are getting behind the project, so too is the local community. To date there have been many ‘walks’ of the golf course to get the re-wilding project to its present point. The latest community gathering showed what the maps and plans mean, allowing a joint vision for the scope of

possibility in future years. Club members and staff joined with community representatives from Landcare, Council, Woodend Bee Friendly Society and consultants to identify plants and share information and new ideas.

When asked about what the re-wilding project means to Woodend, representatives were in agreement the project would provide significant benefits for local flora and fauna as well as the Woodend community.

“This project is a great opportunity for two community organisations to collaborate on connecting the natural environment unique to our township,” says Peter Yates of Woodend Landcare. “We are working on an environment master plan for the Five Mile Creek precinct that adjoins the golf club. We supported each other’s application to the MRSC

community-funding scheme and together we are identifying walking paths to connect the spaces and collaborating on plant identification and revegetation management techniques.

“In years to come the golf course’s re-wilded areas will be a great resource for Woodend Landcare to be able to show what is possible and upskill our members together with the club volunteers to identify local wildlife species and learn about revegetation management techniques.”

William Terry from the Macedon Ranges Shire Council believes such a project as the one being undertaken at Woodend could be done on golf courses across Australia and has been impressed with the level of community engagement it has generated.

“I am blown away by the opportunity for enhancing habitat at Woodend Golf Course,” says Terry. “The course re-wilding will support such a variety of wildlife. As nesting boxes are introduced, remnant vegetation is enhanced, weeds are controlled and plots of revegetation are put in place, we should see a resurgence in native species. It is exciting to think that the club may be home now and in the future to near threatened or threatened species.”

Ross Brierty from Woodend Bee Friendly Society has applauded the club for the creation of a bespoke pollinator plot on course and says Australian golf courses should consider investing in such work.

“Woodend’s approach is almost an extension of our community work to support bees in the local environment,” says Brierty. “Offering support on location, plantings and pitfalls of chemical use that can impact both native and introduced bees, along with hive type and location, helps everyone in the community appreciate the importance of bees and how to protect them as an integral part of our food web.”



Kate Torgersen talks to members and community group representatives during a recent course walk

This aspect of the project also received a tick of approval from Dr Mark Hall, a postdoctoral research Fellow in the area of pollination, community and landscape ecology from the Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment (Western Sydney University).

“The planned Woodend Golf Club pollinator plot will be a great opportunity to



Woodend has a fairly even split between native and exotic species, with the back nine where most of the remnant vegetation resides and re-wilding opportunities lie. Pictured is the par three 14th

transform a greenfield site into a pollinator haven,” Dr Hall says. “It will also feed into the hive of pollinator activity and research being undertaken by the Upper Campaspe Landcare Network. The initiative of this sports club to be part of supporting wildlife shows their connection to their community and an understanding of new methods of course

stewardship. These types of changes are critical to support healthy local pollinators.”

### JUST THE BEGINNING

While the Woodend re-wilding project is still in its infancy, so far it has captured the imagination of golf club members as well as receiving buy-in from the local community.



Just some of the endemic species present at Woodend GC. Left is *Wurmbea dioica* (early Nancy), middle is *Diuris chryseopsis* (Golden moths) and right *Pimelea humilis* (common rice-flower)

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Nature enthusiast and Woodend member Erica Fredriksen sums up what such a project means.

“I am new to Woodend and the game of golf,” explains Fredriksen. “I have loved seeing the wildlife on course, in particular the birdlife, and the recent course walks have opened my eyes to so many plants I had never seen before. Golf is such a great way to connect to our natural world.”

**Editor’s Note:** Woodend Golf Club will provide project updates through its social media channels as it evolves. Interested observers can connect with the club on Twitter @ GolfWoodend.

*The re-wilding project at Woodend offers another way for members and the wider community to be involved at the club*

## RE-WILDING 101 – GETTING THE PROCESS STARTED

Annabel Sides and Kate Torgersen provide some useful tips and advice for golf clubs looking at re-wilding their golf course.

- Allocate time, money and resources to re-wilding your club. This could be through applying for a grant, having a fundraiser or setting up a ‘green golfer’ membership.
- Explore skills with your club to create an environment master plan (EMP) or seek expert advice from a specialist environmental consultant.
- Find out who are the traditional owners of the land on which your club sits and seek to engage with them. Welcome them on course and into your club to be part of the planning process to share local wildlife knowledge, land and waterway management techniques, as well as to identify local significance of the region.
- Ensure your EMP encompasses plant identification and pilot areas, longer-term plans, water, fertiliser and chemical management, seed banking and weed control, seasonal-mow schedules, plus zone identification (riparian, grassland, forest, remnant, revegetation or buffering).
- Identify out-of-play, recovery and play zones and what these mean and why the club has chosen them as part of the environment master plan.
- Investigate being part of a university study for habitat.
- Provide club members and visitors with a bird guide and map as part of their cart hire. Get them involved in local bird count blitzes by encouraging them to download an app and be part of the annual Australian bird count and frog ID program.



- Talk to the local water-catchment authority and see if there are ways to collaborate with them to manage water quality and revegetate and manage riparian zones.
- See if you can work with local tree project volunteers to propagate or provide seed (especially if your course is located in an urban area).



- Talk to a local Landcare to support seed banking for future regeneration projects.
- Use the club platform to write about your efforts to support wildlife.
- Contact local schools to see if they’re interested in a nature and junior golfer program.
- Offer local community engagement at the club through walking tracks, outside of tee times.
- Leave what falls on country on country and resist the temptation to clean up out-of-play areas.
- Allow spaces to green, such as car park areas, rooftops and those out-of-bounds areas that can all contribute to habitat.
- Promote re-wilding practices through social media and broader media channels to connect people to your project.
- Utilise signage to showcase the regeneration areas.
- Join a community of practice such as Environmental Golf Solutions, which hosts Zoom chat sessions where people can ask questions and listen to case study examples.
- Know that when seeking funds, there are opportunities outside of normal sports grants. A conversation with Annabel Sides from Green Planet Sport can help generate ideas around what might be available.
- Take drone footage and pictures to compare your course in future years.
- Commence re-wilding in small out-of-play zones or areas that already have native vegetation.
- Look to include threatened or near-threatened endemic species in your plantings.
- Start today.



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