

## RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

### Considering community values in regional natural resource management

#### Description:

This PhD project is funded by the Future Farm Industries Cooperative Research Centre and is titled 'Natural asset valuation: consideration of held and assigned community values in NRM decision making'. The research began in August 2007 and will conclude in August 2010. The research is being conducted under the supervision of Prof Allan Curtis and Dr Catherine Allan (ILWS, CSU), Prof David Pannell (University of WA) and Dr Anna Roberts (Victorian Department of Primary Industries).

#### Objectives:

An understanding of the values that people hold for natural places is an important consideration for decision-making regarding the management of natural areas at the regional scale. The general values that people hold for the environment are called 'held values', whereas the values that people attach to specific natural places are called 'assigned values'. Assigned values may be able to tell us a great deal regarding the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of individuals regarding specific natural places.

This research aims to make a contribution to improving regional NRM decision-making processes as well increasing theoretical understanding of the links between values and behaviour. More specifically, the research is based on four research questions:

1. What are the differences in valuation of environmental assets among different community groups?
2. To what extent are differences in assigned values explained by held values or other factors?
3. How important are held and assigned values in predicting environmental behaviour?
4. How do regional decision-makers currently consider the range of community values for specific assets in prioritisation processes?

#### Methods:

The study area is located within a 50 km radius of the Moolort Plains in North Central Victoria. Three natural assets are investigated including the Loddon River, Moolort wetlands and Box-Ironbark forests. A number of different community types are also studied. These include urban and rural centre residents, farmers, NRM professionals and members of Field Naturalist groups.

The values assigned to the three assets by different community types will be explored using a combination of techniques from social science and economics. These techniques include semi-structured interviewing, a mail survey, choice modelling and focus groups.

#### Findings to date:

A preliminary study based on semi-structured interviews found that a wide range of values are attached to rivers, wetlands and vegetation. Assigned values common to all three assets included 'life-sustaining', 'recreation', 'aesthetic', 'biological diversity', 'economic', 'existence' and 'historical' values. The Loddon River also had 'community' and 'therapeutic' value. Farmers reported the widest range of values compared to the other groups. The study found that even if individuals shared the same general values about the environment, the values assigned to particular assets could be quite different and wide ranging.



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