

BushTender

Photopoint monitoring

Information Sheet No. 17

What is photopoint monitoring?

Photopoint monitoring is a simple, yet remarkably effective tool in documenting changes within native vegetation sites over time. Monitoring is the process of undertaking periodic surveys or recording results and comparing and evaluating them to determine the effectiveness of actions or the progress of particular projects.

Photopoint monitoring can demonstrate through photographs taken from a fixed 'photopoint' work undertaken and improvements over time. For example the construction of a fence to exclude stock, collapsed rabbit burrows, sprayed weeds, regeneration and new plant species found.

A photograph can help identify land management activities that are improving conditions and potentially show ones that could be having adverse impacts on the site.

Photographs build up a valuable record over time which can be shared with the next generation of the family or given to new owners of the property. They can be used as a historical reference for changes on a property over time. You can also submit photographs as part of your BushTender annual report.

What do I need?

- Camera
- Map or aerial photograph of the site
- Method to mark photopoints - GPS if available
- Post and tag or paint
- Note book.

How do I choose a photopoint?

The photopoint site should be chosen based on the change you want to record. The aim of photopoint monitoring is to use the photographs as an easy comparison to record change over time. When you take an initial photograph, have a clear idea in your mind what change you expect (i.e. weeds replaced by native vegetation).

The photopoint needs to illustrate a distinct feature, for example:

- boundary between grazed and ungrazed vegetation
- extent of weed or rabbit affected area
- good example of a particular vegetation community
- the growth and health of one particular representative plant
- supplementary planting of a remnant native vegetation site
- changes in groundcover. Photographs directed at the ground can show some of the greatest changes over a short period of time.

The location of the photopoint should be carefully chosen to illustrate that *one feature*. The more specific the photograph is, the easier it will be to interpret the sequence of photographs and what is happening on the site.

Choose an easily recognisable location. You, and perhaps somebody else, will need to return to the site in future years. Use a particular tree, fence post or range of hills for a guide, or better still, mark the site with a stake or post. If appropriate, locate the site fairly close to a track for ease of access. Also remember to mark the photopoint location on a site map or use a GPS to record the point.

Set up the photopoint so that the view from the camera is uncluttered – remember, young trees and shrub vegetation will get taller as they grow.

The BushTender Project Officer can provide further advice on the appropriate location for photopoints.

What should I record with my photographs?

It is important that each photograph taken has relevant notes about the site context recorded with it. These notes should describe:

- date, time and local weather conditions
- photopoint location

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- relevant site number as stated in the BushTender Management Agreement
- the direction of the photograph (i.e. facing north, south, east or west, across the landscape or towards the ground)
- a short description of species found in the photograph (e.g. the right of the photograph shows a dominance of Briza, Cocksfoot and Phalaris; the left shows regeneration where weeds have been controlled)
- the reason for taking the photograph or the relevance/significance of the photograph (e.g. before and after rabbit burrow collapsing, new fence erected, or evidence of regeneration in spring after grazing pressure removed)
- the camera used and the camera settings including the zoom setting to allow you to duplicate the photograph at a later date.

All records should be kept with the photographs either in a note book or electronically with reference to the *photograph file* and BushTender site number and zone code. Remember, the more information recorded, the easier it will be to interpret of the outcomes of management actions.

How often should I take photographs?

Photographs can show changes over time. It is best to take photographs at selected times rather than having lots of photographs that show little change. Timeframes for comparisons can be:

- *short* – ‘before’ and ‘after’ for weed removal or initial planting
- *medium* – every 6 or 12 months, when a site is changing rapidly and a lot of visible work is being carried out
- *long* – every few years, when subtle changes are happening. The longer this record is, the more valuable it will be.

For BushTender purposes, short and medium term timeframes are important. It is recommended that photographs be taken periodically throughout the year (at least twice a year) as well as when significant events have occurred at the site. For example:

- when a fence has been constructed
- before and after weed control

- after any stochastic event such as fire or flood
- before and after pest control actions
- before and after supplementary planting.

Additionally, photographs can be taken, at any point in time, of anything of interest occurring on the site (e.g. a new species has appeared after grazing was removed).

Tips for photopoints

- More is not necessarily better – stick to a few good locations and take good photographs.
- Take photographs on a cloudy but bright day – try to avoid strong shadows.
- If possible, take a copy of the previous photographs with you to ensure the new photograph will be framed the same way.
- Do not use a wide angle or telephoto lens as this alters the perspective of the photograph and makes it difficult to repeat.
- Sometimes an elevated position, such as standing on the back of a vehicle, can give a better result, especially if you wish to show understorey density.

How should I present the photographs?

Print out the photographs and add date and site information. Place them with your notes on site management and other observations (species, health/condition, recruitment, flowering etc.) in your BushTender folder. If you are using digital photographs, be sure to clearly label each photograph with location and date so they can be easily accessed in the future.

Further information

Much of the information in this Information Sheet is taken from *Land for Wildlife Note 43, 2002* available from the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) website: www.dpi.vic.gov.au.

For further information on BushTender, please contact the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) Customer Service Centre on **136 186** or visit the DSE Native Vegetation website at: www.dse.vic.gov.au/nativevegetation.

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