



HYDRO SITES RETURN TO THE WILD

Hydro Tasmania is rehabilitating old construction sites in the Derwent and Gordon regions as part of an environmental plan aimed at reducing the visual and ecological impacts of its past and present activities.

Hydro Tasmania botanist Anita Wild says that “people want to be able to go through our areas, particularly in the southwest of Tasmania, and not be able to see a lot of disturbed areas”.

“There are a lot of really good ecological reasons for rehabilitation work too ... we want to actually restore the plant communities and also the habitat.”

The current program involves reassessing areas that were rehabilitated in the late 1990s, as well as identifying new sites for rehabilitation.

“Hydro had a major program that looked at a lot of the disturbed areas down in the Gordon catchment,” Anita said.

“We spent over a million dollars going to old sites, going to quarries, doing a lot of earthworks, and that work has been quite successful.

“Hydro is still doing on-ground rehabilitation works as part of its Land Environment Program.”

Attitudes to environmental impact have changed over the years. At early Hydro construction sites, there was little or no emphasis on rehabilitation.

Untreated sites in the Gordon catchment are not typical of more recent Hydro schemes. During some of the later Hydro projects new techniques were used to rehabilitate areas as the construction was being completed.

“Hydro has been quite revolutionary and innovative in some of the treatments we’ve used particularly in the Anthony and Pieman schemes,” said Anita.

“There was a lot more of a focus on rehabilitation, so as we were actually doing the construction, and before some of the dams were inundated we pulled the peat out of the area and then stockpiled that and stored it and then spread it over some of the other areas that we were rehabilitating, so you’ve got almost like an instant soil mix there that plants can grow straight into.”

Anita says that the current approach to rehabilitation is to modify the local environment to allow the vegetation to take hold more quickly.

“We have environmental impact assessments,” she said. “We do those before we go and do the rehabilitation work because you do still have to be careful that you’re not trying to intervene and do something that may create an adverse impact.

“It’s a case of assessing the site, having a look at what the features of that site may be that are slowing down the growth of the plants, and then trying to address those. The way we look at rehabilitation now is to try to make the site more amenable for plants to grow in rather than just putting a lot of seed on.”

Materials that are brought onto the site are also carefully managed.

“A lot of Australian native plants are quite sensitive to phosphorous so we use a low phosphorous fertiliser so we won’t have impacts on the natural environment, but it’s just enough to give those plants a bit of a boost along,” Anita said.

While the return of natural-looking vegetation is a slow process, techniques such as using locally sourced seed make rehabilitation efforts as effective as possible.

“Some of the original sites are showing signs of regenerating back to rainforest with some native rainforest species coming in, so we certainly are getting these more similar to the native communities around them,” Anita said.

Successful results can be seen in areas such as on the approach to Lake Burbury and on some of the roads in the Anthony scheme, where Anita says that even trained botanists are not able to recognise the rehabilitated areas without having them pointed out.

There has been great interest in the rehabilitation project from people who worked and lived on the old schemes who are often amazed at how the old townships have disappeared back into the wilderness.

While some are no doubt nostalgic and reminisce about times gone by, the heady days of construction, Anita says that on the whole they are pleased to see that the environment has been brought back to a natural-looking state.

Hydro Tasmania identified the sites for rehabilitation through its Land Environment Program and engages contractor [LMRS](#).

“[LMRS](#) are good contractors and have been working on Hydro sites for around 20 years,” said Anita. “They also do a lot of work on mine sites and particularly difficult sites.”

The on-ground expertise provided by [LMRS](#) complements Hydro Tasmania’s strategic approach to managing impacts on the environment. The organisation’s commitment to sustainability is reflected in the way it goes about its business.



Hydro Tasmania
the renewable energy business

Photos courtesy of LMRS,
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