



Water Sensitive Blue Mountains: Suggestions toward improving water literacy

Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group, July 2024

Introduction: water literacy

The Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group and Blue Mountains City Council share a commitment to Water Sensitive Urban Development, as set out in Council's *Water Sensitive Blue Mountains Strategic Plan 2019*. Key elements of that plan are to improve water literacy and increase connection to local waterways, and the plan spells out a number of specific actions for council to take toward those ends. The catchment group suggests three additional actions – not identified in the strategic plan - that council might take toward increased water literacy in the Blue Mountains population:

1. Road signs naming creeks within urban areas of the LGA,
2. Stencils or painted signs on gutters, footpaths or road surfaces,
3. Explanatory signs on council's stormwater biofilters.

Road signs naming creeks in urban areas

In order for residents to have an increased connection to their local waterways, they need to know the names of these waterways and where they are. How many Katoomba/Leura residents – for example - can say whether they live or work in the catchments of Kedumba Creek, Katoomba Creek, Yosemite Creek, Leura Falls Creek, Jamison Creek etc?

It is suggested that one way to increase knowledge is to name the creeks at the points where they pass under streets and roads. Bridges along highways and main roads across NSW are routinely accompanied by a signpost identifying the name of the river or creek being crossed, even when these are small or, in some cases, dry creeks. However in urban areas of the Blue Mountains, creeks are usually not identified, particularly when they pass through a culvert or pipe, rather than under a bridge.

Members of the catchment group have not conducted an audit, but we have not been able to identify any road signs naming creeks within our entire Leura Falls Creek catchment area. It is salutary, for example, to realise that the only signposts identifying Banksia Streamlet are on walking tracks inside the national park, at the bridges on Prince Henry Cliff Walk and in Leura Forest. As part of the process of upgrading walking tracks in the area, NPWS is now doing a good job in signposting creeks within its borders. It might be observed that watercourses through urban areas have historically been thought of as drains – with infrastructure to match – and only perceived as creeks once they reach natural areas. Leura Falls Creek is much loved when it is experienced in the natural environment of Leura Cascades, but how many people are conscious that this is the same creek they cross on the way to Bunnings or Mitre 10?

This ignorance or misperception needs to be overcome as a first step towards developing water literacy in the community. Signposting of creeks in urban areas of the Blue Mountains would help to raise public consciousness that they are in fact creeks, and of the need to look after them.



The catchment group has been requested to suggest locations where creeks could be signposted within the Leura Falls Creek area. Suggested possible locations are:

- Megalong Street, between Leura shopping area and the industrial area:
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/7QvBiWBVzFwpAvV36>
- Govett Street, between Kanimbla Street and Megalong Street, in the industrial area:
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/ftifRsHxMWPxNto1A>
- Wilson Street, between Kanimbla Street and Megalong Street, in the industrial area:
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/bzsEwm1JJxgVuVaZ6>
- Cliff Drive in Leura Cascades area, at the crossing points with the two arms of Leura Falls Creek:
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/q4sxbh2dfAWPBVgZ8> and <https://maps.app.goo.gl/MnYP1FJnsikVWCG49>
- Cliff Drive, Katoomba, at the crossing point with Banksia Streamlet:
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/1d5Q3D3Gr4hWw5o79>

A dilemma is created by the reality that the creeks often pass invisibly under roads through pipes, so there is no creek for motorists to see. For this reason we have nominated locations where there is some degree of visibility of the creeks on at least one side of the road. This dilemma is particularly acute in relation to Gordon Creek, which flows unseen through the inhabited areas of Leura – through private properties and through pipes - until it emerges into the National Park. One possible area to consider a signpost on Gordon Creek is:

- Easter Street, between Everglades Avenue and Holmes Street, at the crossing point with Gordon Creek/Everglades Creek: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/snc5YgQaasSGpzSJA>

Stencils or painted signs on gutters, footpaths or roadsides



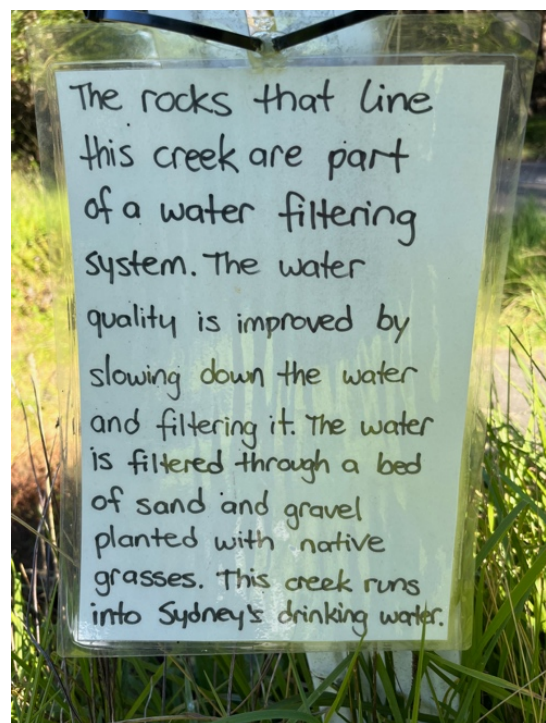
A different kind of sign – even simpler and cheaper – can convey information to people on foot about the catchment they are located in. Messages can be painted or stenciled on gutters, footpaths or roadsides saying e.g. “this drain/creek flows into Leura Falls Creek”. As shown in the photo at left (from North America), artwork and other messages may be incorporated, and this can be a good way of engaging and educating young people. We are aware that this approach has sometimes been used in the Blue Mountains in the past, and has been used in many other places including the catchments of the Lane Cove River and the Northern Beaches lagoons.

Explanatory signs on council's biofilters

Those of us involved in catchment groups are very aware of the good work that council has done in recent years in beginning to move away from the traditional approach to stormwater management of "pits and pipes": channelling stormwater out of inhabited areas as quickly as possible. We appreciate council's work in restoration of creekbanks, and building biofiltration systems to slow water down and remove pollutants.

A further step towards improved water literacy in the community would be to better promote and explain council's work in this area. A simple way to do this would be to place signs on the biofilter structures, explaining what they are for and how they work. Some of the structures are in out of the way locations that few people ever see, but a few of the structures are in highly visible locations with lots of passing foot traffic. In our catchment area, the most prominent is on Banksia Streamlet adjacent to Cliff Drive. Many people – visitors and locals – walk along this section of Cliff Drive. When volunteer bushcarers are working in this area, passers-by often stop and ask questions about the biofilter, and many are very interested. For this reason, a local bushcarer has taken the initiative to put together a simple hand-written sign, encased in plastic and attached to a star picket. She replaces the sign from time to time when it is damaged by the exigencies of weather and time.

It is suggested that more permanent explanatory signs from council – on all of these biofilters – would better promote council's work and contribute to improved water literacy in the community.



In addition to explaining the biofilters, these signs will provide another opportunity to name the creek into which the water is flowing.

Conclusion

The catchment group would hope that council will agree to implement these suggested actions in the Leura Falls Creek catchment area at an early date. Covering both the Katoomba and Leura town centres, and the Katoomba industrial area, this is probably the most urbanised and most populated of all the Blue Mountains catchments. Katoomba High School, Katoomba Public School, and St Canice's all fall within the catchment area. At the same time, we acknowledge that the rationales for these actions are applicable to all catchments across the LGA. Therefore, noting that the Water Sensitive Blue Mountains Strategic Plan is due to be reviewed and updated in 2024, we request that this submission be taken into account and incorporated into the strategy review process.

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