

Media Release:

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## Bringing The Finke Back From The Brink

The Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA) is one step closer to bringing the Finke River back from the brink of Athel Pine infestation.

NRETA weeds officer Chris Brown said a recent injection of \$420,000 from the Australian Government had contributed to the removal of the weed from Horseshoe Bend Station along the Finke River, near Alice Springs.

Mr Brown said the removal of the remaining core infestation of Athel Pine on the section of the Finke River at Horseshoe Bend Station took two months and was an important step towards eradicating the weed from Central Australia.

He said Landcare Week is being celebrated across Australia this week, with a particular focus on weeds, which now make up 15 per cent of plants in Australia, costing the country \$4 billion a year to control.

“The Australian Government money enabled us to put out to tender a project that would involve bulldozers removing the last remaining core infestations of this weed of national significance from Horseshoe Bend Station,” Mr Brown said.

“Although there are significant levels of Athel pine in the lower reaches of the Finke River catchment, Horseshoe Bend Station had by far the largest and most dense infestation of Athel pine along the entire length of the Finke River catchment.

“The removal of the densest core infestation of Athel pine from this section of the river, some up to 30km long, is seen as a major milestone for the program that has been ongoing for the past ten years.”

Mr Brown said Athel pine was promoted and planted extensively around station homesteads and Aboriginal settlements from 1940 to the 1970s as a drought tolerant shade and shelter tree.

He said that while Athel Pine grew at numerous station homesteads bordering the Finke River for 20 to 30 years it did not exhibit its invasive potential as a weed until major flooding of the Finke River system occurred in the 1970s.

“This flooding provided the environmental trigger that enabled the plant to colonise approximately 600 km of this iconic river,” Mr Brown said.

“An active control program has been ongoing for the past 12 years with NRETA’s Weed Management Branch as the lead agent of the program.

“Twelve years of integrated control has brought approximately 400km of the river’s upper catchment under manageable control, which involves annual inspections to mop up residual juvenile and seedlings and regrowth of previously treated dense infestations.”

Mr Brown said Athel Pine, along with 20 major weed species was determined to be one of Australia’s most invasive and detrimental weeds and was subsequently declared a Weed of National Significance (WoNS) in June 1999.

He said a National Athel pine/Mimosa Coordinator, based in Alice Springs, was appointed in December 2006 to help facilitate management of the species across Australia.

Ends

**Media Note – For more information contact Chris Brown on 8951 9210**

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