Project Description

Tallangatta, Victoria
Assessing environmental factors to establish a large community garden
Community partner: Tallangatta Health Service

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See more: https://www.futureearth.org.au/initiatives/community-science-sustainability

The Challenge
Tallangatta is a small town in North-East Victoria of a little over 1000 town residents and around 6000 shire residents. The major industry in the area is agriculture, with some tourism and timber production and processing. Tallangatta was heavily impacted by bushfires in the 2019-2020 season and was the centre of relief efforts over that period. The area has also been subjected to severe drought in the past years.

Tallangatta Health Service (THS) is a small rural health service (and one of the largest single employers in the area) which is a community leader in promoting health and wellbeing through its primary and community services, hospital and aged care. THS is also a member of the Global Green Health Hospitals network and sees environmental protection as a priority. THS promotes a learning environment which is open to innovation through accommodating experimentation and improving the evidence base for health and wellbeing.

Following drought and fire, THS sees one of its roles as building the community's health and resilience through connecting people. THS has secured funding through the *Bushfire Recovery Victoria* program to establish a large community garden (1.5 acres) adjacent to one of its aged care facilities.

In establishing the garden, THS aims to:

- Create a viable plot for food production,
- Establish a place where community members of all backgrounds can gather, connect and build resilience in the aftermath of the bushfires,
- **Incorporate best science to ensure the garden is well situated in its environment, promotes biodiversity, water sensitive design, and includes renewable energy sources where required**,
- Involve community as co-owners and developers of the garden as a community treasure.

Furthermore, they are enthusiastic to capture the learnings from the project to add to existing models (see Community Gardens Manual below) for how other groups may establish similar gardens as loci for community wellbeing and sustainability in the region.

More information:

- Tallangatta Health Service website: https://www.tallangattahealthservice.com.au/
- *Community Gardens Manual* (Helen Macpherson Smith Trust): https://hmstrust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Community-Gardens-Manual.pdf

The Project

The Tallangatta community would like help understanding the environmental context of the garden, so they can design and develop a garden which has the best chance of success and enriches the local environment (both in terms of avoiding harm while also contributing positively to the local ecology and natural systems).

A site assessment will inform decision making in the design of the garden, species planted, infrastructure, so that when the community takes over management of the asset, they will have a garden which is well suited to the systems it grows in – increasing the chances of a successful, long term garden.

Output

The site assessment should include guidance on the following as a start:

- Site topography
- Site orientation
- Soil composition and drainage
- Assessment of area's ecology, including vulnerable species of flora and fauna
- Assessment of site in context of broader water system
- Assessment of how climate change will affect ecosystems over the next 10 years
- A report on how these elements interact, as relevant to decision making around design, development, and management of the garden.

Should the partner also have expertise, the project would also greatly benefit from recommendations on:

- Ideal plant species, both for food production and broader ecosystem
- Creating a biodiverse garden and incorporating pest control consideration into garden design
- Water sensitive design
- Improving soil health
- Design principles which will allow for land use change (given that the adjacent aged care facility will likely change over time)

THS will liaise with local Elders on how the garden may incorporate appropriate knowledge or cultivation practices. The assessment must be cognisant of this.

As core partners, community members and organisations with existing working knowledge and interest in the report on the site's environmental characteristics should be included where possible. This process will be facilitated by THS.

In the context of logistical and travel issues resulting from COVID-19, gathering new data may prove difficult. The final scope of the assessment will likely depend on the use of existing data and other resources.

Rigorous environmental information, paired with the relationships and community health expertise of the THS, will enable the development of a contextually appropriate garden which has longevity both in terms of environmental care, and ownership by the community.

Community Lead
While roles can be negotiated and defined upon partnership, the project manager, Casey Fahey, is in a good position to facilitate community engagement, including outreach for data and local knowledge, to incorporate into the assessment.

Scientist/Specialist Partner
The role of the scientist/specialist for this project will be to complete a site assessment for the THS garden. This will ideally include all the of the areas above, or as many as the scientist/specialist is adept at completing.

Please note that the scientist/specialist is welcome to assemble a team of people with requisite skills to complete the assessment fully, but would be responsible for managing the team (including liaison with FEA and the community partner, organising the inputs and pulling the contributions together in a final output). Students and early career scientists/specialists are welcome to contribute to the team.

Desired skills and competencies:

- Experience in designing and delivering environmental assessments
- Comfortable making predictions about landscape and climate change as it pertains to the project
- Preference for understanding of integrated ecology, climate and soil sciences
- Ability to work online and communicate via videolink with Future Earth Australia and community partner
- Comfortable working with a range of data types, including secondary data and community knowledge
- Awareness and knowledge of rural communities – landscapes, culture and composition
- Respect for and understanding of Indigenous knowledge and connection to Country
- Willingness to answer questions to non-scientific audience and community members over a videocall where required
- Able to translate technical information to a lay audience
- Open to trying novel approaches
- Open to including students
- (If applicable) Open to assembling and managing a team to complete the project

Future Earth Australia asks all scientific/specialist partners to work with the community to help define a project with concrete local impact that they can contribute to as pro-bono volunteers and collaborators.

<u>Timeline</u>
This will be a maximum 6-month project, and the timeline and project plan is designed to be negotiated between all parties. An indicative timeline is as follows:

- ASAP – meet community project manager and FEA staff
- ASAP - October 2020 – Design and development of the methodology
- November 2020 – Data collection and analysis

- February 2021 – First draft of assessment, revision with community and FEA
- March 2021 – Incorporate suggestions and finalising report
- (If required) April 2021 – Video forum with community members, THS staff and other organisations on the report