

Forging ahead on rehabilitation

Many hours of work over the past 15 years has gone into improving Forge Creek Reserve, an ecologically significant creek system of East Gippsland that links to the Gippsland Lakes.

The Forge Creek reserve is about seven kilometres south of Bairnsdale and includes 10km of creek line and over 70 hectares of land.

The reserve contains woodlands and forests around a chain of fresh water ponds that eventually flow into the Gippsland Lakes at Newlands Arm.

Romawi Landcare and Cobblers Creek Landcare groups, together with other volunteer organisations and government agencies, have joined forces to create a healthy environment for native fish, birds and animals along this important waterway.

Improving Forge Creek also helps reduce nutrients entering the Gippsland Lakes.

"Love our Lakes is about a shared responsibility to participate in caring for the Lakes and catchment," Graeme Dear, chief executive of East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, said.

The project has received funding from multiple sources over these years with recent examples being Gippsland Lakes and



Forge Creek Reserve has come a long way since 2010 (inset). (PS)

Landcare funds from the Victorian Government.

Stock is now excluded from the reserve and many adjoining landholders have contributed by fencing off additional land to protect significant trees and sites abutting the reserve.

Controlling weeds has been a huge component of the project and will continue to be a part of the ongo-

ing maintenance undertaken by DEWLP, Romawi Landcare and other involved agencies.

A major erosion problem was addressed by the EGCMA.

"Rocks and vegetation have been placed in critical sites to control erosion, protect vulnerable ponds and help with the flow of water in times of heavy

rains," Ms Dear said.

With flourishing undergrowth and improved water quality, many species including pygmy perch, a small native fish, have returned to the area.

A rare species of water lily was planted on the banks of the ponds and is now self-seeding.

"Romawi Landcare Group has enjoyed the

continued cooperation of landholders, other volunteer groups and agencies," Michelle Judd, a member of Romawi Landcare, said.

Romawi Landcare would like to see the area used as an educational tool. With obvious visual results and easy access, the reserve would make an ideal study area for schools and other groups.