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Students keep watch at A-Bay

Learning how to spot a nasty dieback infestation in Alexander Bay has inspired a group of Esperance Senior High School students to develop a brochure to educate industry.

As part of the ESHS Business Connect Program, Year 10 students designed a brochure to complement remedial works carried out by the Shire of Esperance in conjunction with South Coast NRM and the WA Government in the Alexander Bay and Membinup Reserves east of Esperance.

South Coast NRM Project Dieback officer Tim Brett said the brochure would help maintenance personnel, contractors and earthmoving operators understand their role in keeping dieback at bay.

The brochure outlines three key steps including how to inspect vehicles for cleanliness, how to stay clean and plan for clean operations, and how to look for signs of dieback in the field.

“Dirty earthmoving machinery can be transported very quickly from one area to another and if dirty, can allow the easy introduction of *Phytophthora* dieback into the landscape. All that is required is the right conditions and dieback is mobile, especially with the help of a dozer, loader or grader,” he said.

“Once you see it in action, and see how the vegetation has changed, you can’t help but notice areas where the disease is moving in and leaving in most cases a sedge land in its wake.”

Squeezing all the most important information into a small guide was a challenging task for the students but they did a great job producing a visually appealing and informative resource.

Mr Brett said there was a lot of information in the brochure on being and staying clean of dieback, but South Coast NRM also hoped the brochure would assist basic dieback recognition in the field.

“It’s no good preaching about a disease if you cannot see or interpret the truth. By generating this kind of awareness, the operator will hopefully adopt a stewardship role of looking deeper at the bush whilst working, instead of driving through or past it.”

Dieback can be disastrous to the environment by wiping out entire vegetation structures in an area over time. The collapse in the food chain has a knock-on effect to those animals necessary for pollination, predation and support of a stable ecosystem.

ENDS

Picture features L-R: Megan Dahmen, Darcy Hahnel and Phoebe Mansell photographing a grasstree infected by Phytophthora dieback

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