



Season's
Greetings

Using weed to rewire the brain
Simon Mulvaney

Photo credit: Jonny Renton. Western side of Mount Arawang, near Coleman Ridge, Centenary Trail.

Using Weed to Rewire the Brain

Simon Mulvaney

Honours at the Fenner School of the Environment

Is this a pretty picture? I think most people in this room would agree that it is. Although you are probably wondering what a photo wishing you seasons greetings in the middle of July is doing in this presentation of my thesis. Putting that aside for the minute, this looks like a fairly nice place to go for a Christmas stroll wouldn't you agree? Well you can because this photo was taken in Canberra not far from here. But let's have a closer look at it.

Its got a blue sky, good start.

You might either like or dislike the twinkly lights on the tree... it's a bit cheesy.

What if I tell you that this photo is made up predominately of a class 4 weed called St Johns Wort. Does that mean anything to anybody? I'm starting to see a bit of recognition in the audience about where this is going.

How about if I say that for a farmer grazing livestock, a property looking like this would be a complete and utter failure.

Well so what, I'm not a farmer you might be thinking.

I'll add a bit more information. This landscape pretty much fails on pretty much every criteria, environmental, economic, social and cultural value. Yet there is still some beauty in the landscape.

My thesis looks at trying to rewire your brain to create greater connections between you and the landscape. The stakes are high. If I do this job properly, you won't even realise that your brain is being rewired. If I don't, nothing will change. Perhaps I am rewiring your brain right now? I am using a method called community based social marketing which is a cross between marketing the awareness of weeds with psychological associations leading you to want to actively destroy weeds because you cannot physically bear to walk past one any more. It is something that is easier said than done. I'm working with a number of shire councils around the Snowy Mountains to make sure that I can balance expert weed information with getting members of the public to remove weeds. Coz we don't want members of the public misidentifying your grandma's rose bush for a weed and just removing that!

So, why did I use this picture? This was a Christmas card sent around by someone high up in the ACT Government to all ACT Government staff. This goes to the heart of my problem. If the ACT Government can't recognise a common weed, then we have a long way to go!

Thanks for listening!