

Nature Wellness Drive

A community vision to build a restorative connection with nature!

"Connecting to nature makes me feel personally alive and well and that my spirit is positive."

Sue Bulger, Wiradjuri Elder
CEO Brungle-Tumut Local Aboriginal Land Council

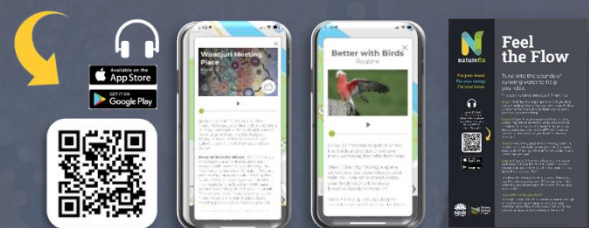
It is now understood that nature does not have a part time role in supporting our health, it is a basic psychological need and an essential pillar of health...

The unprecedented scale of the bushfires, the impact of covid, and then flooding, has left parts of the NSW Snowy Valleys community with heightened levels of anxiety and stress. These impacts have been further exacerbated by a downturn in Tourism and ongoing effects on Forestry and farming incomes. For some Snowy Valleys residents, these combined events have brought forward fear and uncertainty toward the nature that surrounds them.

Developed from a community initiative, the Snowy Valleys Nature Wellness Drive seeks to rekindle our deep longing to reconnect with the natural world - as nature recovers the community also recovers.

The wellness drive offers a unique and invigorating overlay on the stunning Snowy Valleys landscape. It is designed to unlock the health and healing benefits of nature through

self-guided experiences and interactive installations carefully matched with the optimal natural features known to improve wellbeing.



Scan to download the FREE **NatureFix** app to start your journey. The app responds to your location and leads you on a uniquely inspiring experience with nature.

We acknowledge all Aboriginal People of the Snowy Valleys and value their long, rich cultural and spiritual connections to the Snowy Valleys area. We thank all of the caretakers past and present, for their tending of land, waterways and cultures. We continue to pay our deepest respects to the Elders: past, present and emerging.

naturefix

www.naturefix.life

Designing the drive

"We were guided by the community on what areas were special to them and where we should deliver the trails and stops.

Recognising, the social, emotional psychological, physical and financial impact the fires have had across the region and how difficult it is for communities to take steps forward on their own.

We felt it was important to build community healing gently. As with all people and communities, the enormous stress and grief is often highlighted in cracks within community cohesion, and it was important to us that we did not add more pressure to this. For this reason, we chose Batlow as the centre of Snowy Valleys to start the project and were careful to involve all the different factions within the community from the outset. From there the project began to build."

Jacinta Elphick
Disaster Recovery Clinician

The Nature Wellness Drive consists of a series of trails and stops across the Snowy Valleys



NatureFix self-guided routines were carefully matched with the natural features across the Snowy Valleys. With over 40 guided scripts and activities, individuals are invited to slow down and absorb the multisensory details of nature – providing *quality of moments* with nature rather than quantity of minutes. Specific design strategies included:

- Creating spaces and seating to invite people to pause and reflect in areas of prospect and refuge. Nature connection routines placed in locations particularly restorative e.g. breathtaking views, calming waters.
- Installing windy walkways to create mystery and awe, to invite childlike play across all the ages. Facilitating sensory experiences - from shade to light, moving between quieter spaces and louder spaces – showcasing a variety of textures, smells and sounds.
- Providing stories of Country – stories that have been passed down through story-telling process for over tens-of-thousands of years. The stories remain embedded in the Country and continue to be celebrated to this day.

"My knowledge as a storyteller is through my mother, so the stories that I tell are my family stories."

Shane Herrington
Wiradjuri-Wolgalu knowledge holder

- Biomorphic shapes and forms were used in the design of infrastructure using sustainable timber, including the sky seat and listening pod.
- Increasing the chances of unexpected non-human encounters, especially birds. Taking visitors deeper into the language of birds.
- Focusing attention on natural fractal patterns in nature such as tree ferns and water.
- Using beautiful technology - imagery inspired by the forms of nature.

Nature's health benefits

The significance of the relationship between our health and the natural environment is becoming increasingly clear. There is now a wealth of scientific evidence on the positive physical and psychological benefits of nature in adults and children.

It's not just the contact with nature but the nature of the contact that counts!

We know that the type of green space and the amount of time you spend there influences health. But the latest research shows that amplifying the health benefits of nature is in the *quality of the moments* that we spend there. In other words, maximising health benefits is about designing meaningful moments in nature not just minutes.

The latest global interdisciplinary research confirms that the psychological measures of how connected we are to nature, commonly known (or termed) as nature connectedness is an important indicator of wellbeing. It is also a key driver of pro-social and pro-environmental behaviours.

Nature connectedness

Nature connection (or connectedness) is a measurable construct that broadly describes a person's cognitive, affective and experiential relationship with nature, including one's worldview: i.e. the extent that one sees themselves as being a part of the rest of nature. Or more simply: how one thinks about, feels and experiences the natural world.

The key is in the noticing: slowing down to absorb multisensory detail, finding beauty, feeling emotions, and reflecting on symbolism and meaning. If it were merely about time spent outside then one would expect that everyone with an outdoor profession would be thriving, and yet we know that is not the case. What matters is the quality of the moments rather than just the quantity of the minutes.

The growing interest in nature connectedness stems from the fact that it finds a strong and robust link with greater wellbeing. It has also found to be a mediating pathway for emotional-nervous system regulation, mental resilience, eudemonic wellbeing (life satisfaction and sense of a worthwhile life), and greater overall happiness.

Simply noticing the good things in nature every day brings clinically significant and sustained improvements in mental health. This is supported by neuroscience research which has shown that environmental quality is necessary but insufficient to guarantee a state of happiness. What is required is an effort on the part of the individual - or guided instruction - to synthesise happiness within that given environment.

Through good design, the nature wellness drive encourages people to not only get outside, but to increase their level of connectedness - transforming a minute in nature into a meaningful moment with nature - and thereby unlocking a cascade of health benefits.

"We're really starting to see the nature wellness trails and the benefits from it, being really important in preventative healthcare, and self-care as well."

Jenni Wines
Bushfire Disaster Recovery Clinician

First Nations engagement

This project acknowledges and respectfully recognises that research is only now confirming what First Nations Peoples across the globe have known for a long time, the true benefits of nature can only be fully realised when we develop an emotional connection and a participative relationship with nature.

Throughout the project, knowledge holders and Elders were engaged in the delivery process and where possible, stories on the healing powers of country from local First Nations knowledge holders were included in design. This includes Welcome to Country in language and English, stories of creation and invitations to connect with country in ways that calm your mind and lifts your spirits.

A Community Vision

The Nature Wellness Drive is a vision of many...

The drive was kindly supported by funding from the Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network, the Forestry Corporation NSW, and the Blakeney Millar Foundation. Significant in-kind contributions made through the hands-on efforts of the Murrumbidgee Local Health District Bushfire Recovery Team and the many community groups across the Snowy Valleys.

The NatureFix team supported the design of the of the drive and hold a range of scientific, design and facilitation specialities with extensive experience in the field of nature-based interventions. The drive is based on many years of scientific research and review on the principals of nature connection and health. In partnership with Macquarie University the [Living Lab research program](#) has been successfully testing the health and wellbeing benefits of NatureFix.

Community engagement

Over 12 months, each trail within the wellness drive was developed in consultation with the local communities who engage with their landscapes as part of their every day. Where budget allowed the trail expanded to include local voices and their stories of place and their connection to their natural environment.

The consultation process worked with key individuals identified as community leaders but also ensured that the voices of 'everyday' community members were an essential part of design.

This engagement was done in recognition that the process of consultation is a healing process in itself. When people experience such climate induced disasters, they may for a time not only grieve the natural landscape but also feel afraid and disconnected from their surroundings. A feeling of being overwhelmed with uncertainty of where to start. The drive looks to help rebuild community through forging a common and connected experience across the Snowy Valleys.

By talking with people about what they love about their environment what vision they would like to showcase of the natural beauty to others - was a really valuable step in the healing process for community.

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What's Next?

The drive is just the start...

The health benefits of nature now embedded within the community as part of their everyday... with the potential to reach and support tens-of-thousands – both locals and visitors alike. It is also achieving significant penetration into the health sector, and tourism market.

Redefining eco-tourism

Encouraging visitors to feel new by embracing awe and joy is part of NSW economic tourism strategy to 2030. The Nature Wellness Drive is proud to promote nature across the Snowy Valleys, helping visitors to 'feel new'.

Promoting nature-based health

This project has significantly raised the profile of the health benefits of nature within NSW Health (via our Local Health District and NSW Ministry of Health partners). This will continue as health practitioners promote and use the walks and drive.

Indigenous health

The healing benefits of Country in this region are being built and expanded on – working with the Local Aboriginal Land Council, local knowledge holders and Aboriginal Health team to develop a dedicated Indigenous Connections to Country prescription program linked to the drive. Designed so Aboriginal Healthcare workers can use the program for addressing mental and physical health when working with community.

In addition, there are plans to work with schools and other community groups to build installations across the region that specifically target young people's engagement with and connection to nature.

This is a vision of many, thanking:

- ✓ Adelong Alive Museum
- ✓ Batlow Community and Cultural Association Inc
- ✓ Blakeney Millar Foundation
- ✓ Brungle Tumut Local Aboriginal Land Council
- ✓ Forestry Corporation of NSW
- ✓ Khancoban United Volunteers Association
- ✓ Murrumbidgee Local Health District
- ✓ Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network
- ✓ Snowy Valleys Council
- ✓ Snowy Valleys Resilience Hub
- ✓ Sounds of the Mountains Community Radio
- ✓ Talbingo Community Association
- ✓ The Connective (NatureFix)
- ✓ Tumbarumba Rotary Club