

Maher, Deirdre (from the Forester Dec 2011)

Deirdre Kaye Maher

20 June 1967 - 13 August 2011

Friends and colleagues of Forest Scientist, Deirdre Kaye Maher, who recently passed away after a short illness, have paid tribute to her professionalism, her love for the forest and her ability to gain respect from all those she came in contact with.

Deirdre graduated from Melbourne University with a Bachelor of Forest Science with Honours in 1990 and returned to Western Australia to start her working life in which she demonstrated her passion for the environment and in particular the forests of the south-west. Deirdre's career with CALM, later the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), began in 1990 as a junior officer at Manjimup at a time when women were a rarity in forestry, and District field operations in particular. Deirdre soon became familiar with what was required and quickly gained the respect of contractors and crews. by never trying to be "one of the boys", but by being proud to be a woman in a predominantly male workplace.

She soon gained a reputation for not backing down when she knew she was right. Early in her career an irate log loader operator objected to being told by Deirdre to send a particular log to the sawmill. Despite the loader driver's response of **"no bloody woman is going to tell me what to do"**, Deirdre stood her ground and the log was soon on its way to the sawmill. This was vintage Deirdre and from that point on she gained new found respect from the "boys" in the bush.

It was during these years that Deirdre developed her love of silviculture, (the science, cultivation and management of forest trees and their reaction to disturbance over time.), especially the intricacy of jarrah forest management. In 2007 Deirdre was appointed Senior Silviculturist with DEC and worked out of Bunbury Office for the last 3 1/2 years. Her experience and attention to detail earned her great respect and staff soon found out that work completed to Deirdre's satisfaction would stand up to any scrutiny inside or outside the Department.

In addition to her silvicultural role Deirdre had a responsibility for mentoring younger women in the agency. This was a role she enjoyed and undertook with enthusiasm. Several women (and men) remember her contributions to their career and the great example of the professional rigour she applied to her own work. These are some of the tributes from her colleagues.....

Deirdre was both a mentor and a friend. I am ever thankful and grateful for her words of advice and willingness to help. She was a beautiful, giving and determined person who stood up for what she believed in. I know we have all gained, and will continue to benefit, from her passion for the forests and for those she cared about.

Deirdre's approach to her work was meticulous, conscientious and dedicated. There was no getting it "95%" correct, it had to be "100%" correct and the reasoning behind the decisions she made had to be fully researched and understood.

I will cherish my memory of sitting on a log in the bush at lunchtime during a training session with Deirdre. Having the rare but enjoyable opportunity to briefly switch mind-sets and conversation, from forester to mother, from crop tree protection to pre-school separation anxiety. Deirdre was another soul who knew about both!

Deidre was much loved by her husband Tony and their children Leah and Michael. She left us far too young, with so much more to contribute to the science of forest silviculture, a knowledge and skill that will become increasingly important for sound management of the forests of the south-west Western Australia in the face of changes in climate and community expectations.

(Bob Hagan)