



CORPORATE POLICY STATEMENT NO. 88

PRESCRIBED BURNING

August 2023

1. OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Apply prescribed burning activities in the areas where they contribute the most effective mitigation of bushfire risk; and contribute to the management of conservation, biodiversity and Aboriginal cultural heritage values.
- 1.2 Reduce the likelihood of negative impacts on communities and the natural environment from bushfires on lands managed by the department.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (the department) management of lands classified in the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* (CALM Act) as State forest; a timber reserve; national park; conservation park; nature reserve; land referred to in section 5(1)(g) and vested in the Conservation and Parks Commission (the Commission); land referred to in section 5(1)(h) and under the care, control and management of the Commission; freehold land vested with the Executive Director; or land that, under an agreement made under section 8A(5)(b), is managed for a public purpose that is consistent with the CALM Act. These lands are referred to in this policy as 'department-managed lands'.

This policy also applies to land managed by the department under the *Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006* (SCRM Act).

The bushfire mitigation aspects of this policy are also applicable to unallocated Crown land and unmanaged reserves outside the Perth metropolitan area, regional centres, townsites, and to department-managed lands within gazetted fire response zones within the Perth metropolitan area, regional centres, and gazetted town boundaries. Aspects of the policy related to the powers conferred by section 45 of the *Bush Fires Act 1954* and exercisable by authorised CALM Act officers are also applicable to lands prescribed in section 45 of the Bush Fires Regulations 1954.

3. CONTEXT

The quantity and distribution of flammable vegetative material across a landscape is a key determinant of the susceptibility of the landscape to bushfire. Prescribed burning involves the planned introduction of fire into the landscape to reduce the quantity and distribution of flammable material, in a manner that reduces the potential impact of bushfires and maintains biodiversity. Sound fire management strategies and operational planning must take into consideration the variable responses of species and ecosystems to differing fire regimes when determining the most appropriate actions to apply.

The impacts of fire on the environment vary depending on the season, scale, intensity, interval and frequency, Prescribed burning is used to achieve a range of land management objectives including the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity; maintenance of ecosystem health; conservation of soil, water, and catchment values; regeneration and protection of native forests and plantations; protection of private and public infrastructure, natural and cultural heritage, recreation sites and scenic values. The potential scale and impact of bushfires on human communities and the environment can be significantly reduced through the application of prescribed burning informed by scientific knowledge and professional judgement.

Parks and Wildlife Service's planned fire management activities consider bushfire-related risk when determining appropriate management regimes to minimise harm from bushfire to the community, and for managing the land and biodiversity values in its care.

Since the 1960s, successive Western Australian governments have supported prescribed burning in the south-west forest areas and more recently across most land managed by the department, as a valid and necessary technique for the treatment of bushfire-related risk and achieving land management objectives more generally.

Sections 33(1)(a) and 33(3) of the CALM Act and section 33(1) of the SCRM Act provide for the department to manage lands to which the Acts apply, including the application of prescribed burning, which is a necessary land management activity.

4. STANDARDS

The standards for fire management are detailed in the department's fire management doctrine, bushfire and prescribed burning manuals, relevant Fire Standard Operating Procedures, and management plans prepared by the department on behalf of the Commission.

5. LEGISLATION

Legislation relevant to this policy includes:

- *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*;
- Conservation and Land Management Regulations 2002;
- *Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006*;
- Swan and Canning Rivers Management Regulations 2007;
- *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*;
- Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2018;
- *Bush Fires Act 1954*;
- Bush Fires Regulations 1954;
- *Environmental Protection Act 1986*;
- *Emergency Management Act 2005*; and
- *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cwth).

6. POLICY

6.1 Prescribed Burning

Prescribed burning is the primary fuel management tool used by the department to mitigate against bushfire risk, and for maintaining or improving ecosystem health.

The department will apply a Bushfire Risk Management Framework to assist with the identification and prioritisation of individual planned burn areas to deliver the most effective bushfire mitigation outcomes.

An indicative three-year strategic Burn Options program will be prepared by each of Parks and Wildlife Service's nine regions. These indicative programs will consider biodiversity conservation and Aboriginal cultural heritage outcomes and the reduction of the risk of harm from bushfires, at the landscape scale¹ and with consideration to landscape management units².

Individual prescribed fire plans will detail the objectives for each planned burn and the methods to be applied to achieve them.

The department will continue to maintain an effective system of roads, fire access tracks, airstrips, and helipads that facilitate the implementation of prescribed burn actions and provide a fuel-free environment for personnel from which fire management activities can be safely implemented.

6.1.1 Mechanical Fuel Modification

Where appropriate, the department will consider and apply the use of mechanical 'non-fire' treatment methods to alter vegetation structure to assist with the achievement of land management and bushfire mitigation objectives as part of a planned prescribed burn. Mechanical fuel modification is generally applied to enhance burn boundary security and safety for fire ground personnel; in areas where the risks from prescribed burning are considered too high; or where fuels are elevated with a discontinuous ground fuel layer where the unmodified vegetation would typically only burn under less manageable fire conditions.

6.2 Safety and Risk Management

Protection of human life, built and natural assets, risk assessment, and the selection of risk treatments will be incorporated into all decision-making processes associated with fire planning and management, consistent with the risk management principles specified in *AS/NZS ISO 31000:2018 Risk Management: Principles and Guidelines*.

6.3 Engagement

The department recognises and acknowledges the legitimate interests, knowledge, and experience of internal and external stakeholders. It will communicate and consult with key stakeholders, local government, traditional owners, industry, and community interest groups in development of the indicative Burn Options program.

The department is strongly committed to working with traditional owners through joint and cooperative management arrangements, building a positive working

¹ A mosaic where the mix of local ecosystems and landforms is repeated in a similar form over a kilometres-wide area. Several attributes including geology, soil types, vegetation types, local flora and fauna, climate and natural disturbance regimes tend to be similar and repeated across the whole area.

² An agglomeration of vegetation complexes and ecological vegetation systems, as defined and mapped by Matiske and Havel (2002), to form more compact management units that recognise the underlying ecological characteristics.

relationship to deliver fire management outcomes and engendering inter-generational transfer of cultural knowledge and enabling Aboriginal people to be back on country and caring for country.

The department will seek to enhance community awareness of the rationale for the application of prescribed burning and include information on post-burn monitoring processes.

6.4 Capability and Capacity

The department will maintain a fire management capability and capacity that ensures that the department's annual prescribed burning operations are implemented safely and cost-effectively.

Fire management personnel will be highly mobile, appropriately trained, competent, and fit for work to fulfil the roles to which they are appointed.

6.5 Maintaining Ecosystem Health

The department will endeavour to maintain the resilience and function of the State's native ecosystems through the application of prescribed fires that vary in scale, seasonality, frequency, interval, and intensity within acceptable ranges with the aim of creating an appropriate mosaic of vegetation stages, types, and structures across the landscape. The implementation of pre-burn monitoring of fauna and fauna strategies, consideration and application of technology advancements and appropriate management measures to meet this objective will continue to be supported by science, enabling evidence-based decision-making and the implementation of integrated fire management programs.

6.6 Research and Knowledge

The department is committed to enhancing and innovating fire management practices through learnings from traditional knowledge and through the application of a systematic, science-based approach to better understand and increase our knowledge of the behaviour and ecological effects of fire across a range of Western Australian ecosystems.

The department will conduct, collaborate in, sponsor, and maintain awareness of current research into fire behaviour, ecology, and operational practice that may contribute to the improvement of fire management.

The department is committed to the process of continuous learning to improve the safety, effectiveness and efficiency of our fire management business and will pursue collaborative arrangements and opportunities to participate in or deliver integrated training programs with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) and other relevant fire authorities and organisations.

7. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

7.1 The annual Burn Options program developed with reference to applicable management plans, the Bushfire Risk Management Framework and in consultation with key stakeholders will be submitted to Corporate Executive for approval each year.

- 7.2 The **Director General** is responsible for taking measures including prescribed burning to prevent, manage or control fire on department-managed lands, and ensuring that the resources and authorities are in place to enable the policy to be implemented. Assisted by the Executive Director, Regional and Fire Management Services, the Director General may delegate specific accountabilities and responsibilities in relation to bushfire incident management, prescribed burning, and the acceptance of risk to personnel.
- 7.3 The **Executive Director Regional and Fire Management Services** is responsible for the effective implementation of the policy; ensuring that personnel involved in prescribed burning and bushfire incident management have the necessary competencies, delegations, and resources to comply with the department's standards; maximising opportunities to achieve the indicative program of prescribed burning; and monitoring and ensuring the correct functioning of critical controls. The Executive Director may delegate specific accountabilities and responsibilities in relation to prescribed burning and the acceptance of risk to other personnel.
- 7.4 The **Manager Fire Management Services Branch** is responsible for developing, maintaining, and ensuring implementation of the department's policies, standards, procedures, guidelines, and other requirements in relation to bushfire incident management and prescribed burning; establishing and maintaining a system to monitor officer competence; operational liaison with the Office of Bushfire Risk Management and DFES; and for all technical matters relating to the department's prescribed burn program.
- 7.5 **Managers** are responsible for applying and complying with standards, procedures and documents relating to prescribed burning and bushfire incident management in their areas of responsibility: and for monitoring the correct functioning and ongoing applicability of risk controls.
- 7.6 All personnel are responsible for understanding and fulfilling their obligations and specific functions in relation to this policy.

8. CUSTODIAN

Executive Director Regional and Fire Management Services.

9. PUBLICATION

This policy will be made available on the department's public website and intranet.

10. KEY WORDS

Bushfire; bushfire-related risk; fuel modification; planned fire; prescribed burning; prescribed fire; prescribed burn risk management; risk management framework; risk treatment.

11. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed no later than August 2028.

12. DIRECTOR GENERAL APPROVAL

Approved by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SS', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Stuart Smith
DIRECTOR GENERAL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Date: 8 August 2023