

Forest Management Plan 2024-2033

Implementation Action Plan

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Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions



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INTRODUCTION

The Forest Management Plan 2024-2033 (FMP) provides the overall policy framework for protecting and managing forests on public lands in our south-west. It is a statutory management plan under Part V of the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* (CALM Act). It describes the pressures on our south-west forests and in response, provides objectives, management activities and key performance indicators.

Commencing on 1 January 2024, the FMP is being implemented in accordance with governance structures, systems and processes developed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA). On 17 April 2024, the [State Government announced a \\$67.2 million](#) investment over four years to implement the FMP, with \$12.5 and \$14.2 million allocated to 2024-25 and 2025-26, respectively. This *FMP Implementation Action Plan* identifies the year two progress expectations for the implementation of the FMP's initial priority management activities.

The initial implementation focus aligns with Government priorities and aims to respond to public expectations. These include cooperative management with Noongar Traditional Owners, a new forest health monitoring program supported by emerging technologies, fire research, and ecological thinning to improve forest health. Implementing the FMP will increase management of feral predators, weeds, plant diseases and other pressures as well as increased effort in compliance and enforcement actions to protect our native vegetation and wildlife. The FMP also commits to adding more than 400,000 hectares of karri, jarrah and wandoo forests to the conservation estate as nature reserves, national parks and conservation parks.

The resources provided for FMP implementation are structured in a *ramp up* model where funding is planned to increase over the initial years of the FMP. This will mean that some FMP activities will be immediately integrated into the business-as-usual functions of DBCA and others, while not considered of lesser importance, may be either partially implemented or deferred as resources allow.

This plan aligns with the four management foundations of the FMP, i.e.

1. Noongar cultural heritage and management partnerships.
2. Biodiversity conservation.
3. Forest health and climate resilience.
4. Social and economic benefits and opportunities.

Management activities with expenditure allocated for implementation in 2024-25 and 2025-26 are organised with reference to the relevant sections of the FMP¹. All management activities are outlined in the [FMP](#).

Implementation of multiple management activities in parallel, together with monitoring and research activities, will have a synergistic effect and allow the department to support biodiversity conservation, better maintain or improve forest health and enhance climate resilience. The effectiveness of implementation of these management activities will be evaluated to inform and adjust processes within an adaptive management framework. The results will be reported through periodic assessments, published at years five and ten.

¹ This may mean that numbering of sections below is not sequential as not all management activities have budget allocated in 2024/25 or 2025/26.

FMP IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

Foundation 1: Noongar cultural heritage and management partnerships

Strategic goal: To value and protect Noongar cultural heritage and support Noongar Traditional Owner involvement.

Noongar Traditional Owners will be involved in forest management and the implementation of the FMP.

Cooperative and joint management

FMP implementation is linked to cooperative and future joint management arrangements between Noongar Traditional Owners and DBCA. These arrangements will involve and partner with Noongar Traditional Owners in forest management decisions and practices through a cooperative management approach, largely via the Cooperative Management Committees established between DBCA and each Noongar Corporation under the South West Native Title Settlement.

The following will occur in the initial FMP stages:

- Noongar Traditional Owners will be consulted about annual ecological thinning and strategic prescribed burning options.
- Options for better promotion of Noongar cultural awareness for south-west based DBCA staff, volunteers, and contractors will be explored through the six DBCA - Noongar Regional Corporation cooperative management committees.
- Discussions to enable and support Noongar customary activities in the FMP area initiated.
- DBCA will develop a knowledge sharing protocol to provide Traditional Owners confidence in sharing information.
- DBCA will continue discussions with Noongar Traditional Owners and work towards identifying reserves for joint management.

Protection of Noongar cultural heritage

It is imperative is to ensure that Noongar cultural heritage is valued and protected. To progress elements of the FMP that require disturbance activities such as ecological thinning, where necessary, appropriate cultural heritage monitoring and/or surveys will be completed to identify and protect areas of significant cultural value in partnership with the respective Noongar Regional Corporations.

Foundation 2: Biodiversity conservation

Strategic goal: To conserve biodiversity and support ecosystem resilience.

Biodiversity of south-west forests is a key value that is highly regarded by the community and a fundamental consideration of ecologically sustainable forest management.

5.4.1 Maintaining and expanding the conservation reserve system

The FMP sets a target of the progressive addition of at least 400,000 hectares of lands to the conservation reserve system by 2033. When implemented, the conservation reserve system is

intended to meet the *Nationally Agreed Criteria for the Establishment of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve System for Forests in Australia*², and targets for the FMP area.

Tenure change is a lengthy process involving multiple steps and detailed consideration. DBCA has commenced the process to prioritise reserve design and by year two, the following will be in progress:

- DBCA in consultation with the Noongar Regional Corporations, will commence determining indicative boundaries and proposed tenure for the new conservation reserves.
- Consultation on specific, more progressed, proposed conservation reserves with interest holders and other stakeholders will have commenced.
- Tenure change processes for some reserves will have commenced.

5.4.2 Conserving biodiversity

Management of biodiversity under the FMP complements regional conservation plans, other reserve management plans, and recovery plans for threatened species and communities. As the forest responds to the new FMP management regime and the pressures of a warming and drying climate, trends in key biodiversity indicators will be measured through a Forest Health Monitoring Program (FHMP) which will meet the strategic goals of both Foundations 2 and 3 of the FMP. The FHMP implementation plan will be published in 2024. Biennial reports summarising activities and implementation of the program will be made available from 2026.

5.4.3 Managing permitted disturbance activities

DBCA will assess relevant disturbance activities including major maintenance, new prescribed burn boundaries, large scale recreation sites and access improvements, and ecological thinning through its Disturbance Approvals System (DAS). The DAS will be maintained and enhanced through adding spatial functionality and background reference data, refining input prompts, and providing training for users and proponents.

While the regulation of exploration and extraction activities related to resource development activities is beyond the scope of the FMP, DBCA will actively liaise with proponents, government agencies and decision making authorities to provide proposal specific advice to manage and minimise impacts of planned disturbance.

Foundation 3: Forest health and climate resilience

Strategic goal: To maintain or improve forest health and enhance climate resilience.

Climate change is a well-recognised pressure on south-west forest values and presents significant challenges for maintaining forest health. The FMP seeks to better understand and tackle the cumulative stressors and threatening processes that interact with climate change in forest ecosystems.

5.5.2 Climate adaptation: active forest management and ecological thinning

Under the FMP, a range of active and adaptive management strategies to promote forest health, and resilience to the impacts of climate change will be implemented. One of these strategies, ecological

² https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/sitecollectiondocuments/rfa/publications/nat_nac.pdf

thinning, involves the removal of trees from areas to reduce competition for moisture and other resources among retained trees and understorey.

As a government focus and in response to the public interest expressed during consultation processes, ecological thinning is a priority objective of the FMP and commenced in 2024 with the following accountability and transparency measures:

- Annual ecological thinning plans will be available for consultation and following review, will be maintained as publicly available documents.
- Silvicultural guidelines will be publicly released following evaluation of the 2024 ecological thinning program.
- Ecological, ecophysiological and hydrological research and monitoring infrastructure at sites relevant to ecological thinning sites will be activated and installed where required.

Case study: 2024 forest die-off and adaptive management

A significant vegetation die-off event occurred after the 2023-24 protracted hot and dry summer in the jarrah and karri forests, tuart and *Banksia* woodlands, and in shrubs from the Eneabba sandplains to the south-coast. DBCA in collaboration with Murdoch University and other university partners conducted fieldwork using a range of techniques, including remote sensing and satellite data to determine the location, severity and size of die-off patches, affected vegetation types and species, and susceptible site characteristics including geology and soils.

Field and laboratory research continues with the intent to better understand the ecophysiology of key plant species, particularly their water use strategies, drought tolerance, ability to recover from drought, and critical thresholds of water availability and heat likely to cause plant deaths.

By understanding the common and unique characteristics of die-off sites within a vegetation community, ecologists and land managers can anticipate future events, target research and identify adaptive management strategies that may help reduce the impact of die-off events in certain circumstances.

Adaptive management in this context and subject to the FMP, includes the application of ecological thinning. Analysis of the 2024 die-off and its abiotic and biotic contributing factors is being incorporated into ecological thinning silvicultural guidelines and forest enhancement area selection. This work demonstrates how evaluating and learning from the forest's response to events such as this informs management approaches to improve forest resilience.

5.5.4 Fire management

Prescribed burning in the planning area is conducted in accordance with legislative responsibilities, State Government policy and DBCA corporate policies, standards and operational procedures. The protection of life (people and communities) is the primary consideration when planning and implementing fire management activities, with biodiversity conservation and other land management considerations also an integral part of the process. Fire is an important element in forest health and ecosystem regeneration, and nutrient cycling functions. Many species have a range of mechanisms to persist through fire or recolonise after burning.

Recognising the strong public interest in fire management practices, a collaborative scientific research program into bushfire and prescribed burning will be established between DBCA and Western Australia's research institutions, to investigate the impacts of fire and its management on forest ecosystems and biodiversity, and to identify approaches to protect vulnerable elements without compromising the broader responsibility of prescribed burning. The first two years will include a 6-month period of engagement with external researchers on priorities and project design, with research collaborations commencing in early 2025. While this research program is underway, DBCA will maintain and update its fire management and response capability; and prescribed burning will continue to reduce accumulated fuel loads and mitigate against bushfire risk in a manner that considers land management and biodiversity requirements.

Fire research, monitoring and community engagement will inform adaptive practices for continual improvement in the management of forest health and biodiversity.

5.5.6 Pest animals

The Western Shield fauna recovery program is a high priority program for DBCA and the cornerstone of protecting native wildlife from introduced invasive predators. FMP funding will enable an expansion of Western Shield over key forest ecosystems to better optimise the frequency of fox baiting and integrate feral cat baiting in suitable areas. Western Shield monitoring results will be reported through the FHMP and other mechanisms.

5.5.10 Unauthorised activities

Unauthorised activities harm the environment, impact cultural sites and detract from visitors' enjoyment of the forest. There has been increasing community concern for impacts from unauthorised forest uses such as illegal firewood collection, rubbish dumping, pig hunting and unauthorised off road vehicle use. In response the FMP provides new and dedicated resources to improve management of unauthorised activities, along with education and information programs aimed at changing damaging forest behaviours.

These programs aim to support increased compliance and enforcement activity to produce outcomes that are consistent with legislation applicable to the various land tenures and offences. This will be supported by the development of education materials and messaging as part of a forest behaviour change program.

Foundation 4: Social and economic benefits and opportunities

Strategic goal: To deliver social, cultural and economic benefits through the provision of goods and services.

The planning area provides a range of social, cultural and economic benefits for the community. In terms of direct and indirect employment, the most significant sectors relate to forest-based resources, and recreation and tourism.

5.6.1 Nature-based tourism and recreation

Outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism contributes to public understanding and appreciation of nature, conservation and forest management, as well as providing physical and mental health benefits for the community. In providing for this community need for enjoyable and enriching visitor experiences the protection and conservation of other forest values and uses must be ensured.

In the initial years of the FMP, the public can expect to experience new options and availability of tracks and trails as well as public infrastructure for access and sustainable forest use.

5.6.3 Forest based resources

The FMP provides for continued public access to designated areas of State forest for personal, domestic firewood collection. DBCA will continue to facilitate firewood collection from designated areas. Public firewood collection areas may not be equivalent in location, size and number to the past.

To assist with managing the high demand on public firewood collection, the FMP provides for forest products (including firewood) to be salvaged from clearing ahead of approved mining operations and infrastructure development, and through ecological thinning. Forest products will be available for the public to purchase from legitimate³ commercial suppliers.

5.6.4 Access

In 2024-25 and 2025-26, DBCA will continue to invest in maintaining and upgrading access to the forest. The forest road network is critical infrastructure in facilitating pine plantation and forest management, prescribed burning edges and rapid bushfire response, thereby reducing the hazard to life, property and the environment from large, high intensity bushfires. A maintained key forest roading network provides for public safety while also protecting biodiversity by limiting the risk of weeds and disease spread, and reducing soil and water damage from erosion and uncontrolled runoff.

5.6.5 Stakeholder and community engagement

DBCA values public participation and recognises the need to continue to seek and consider, in a meaningful way, the knowledge and opinions of others in its decision-making processes. Allocation of resources will enable DBCA to consult with forest stakeholders through active processes such as forums, engagement on ecological thinning, consultation on reserve design, as well as proactive communication and community education through newsletters, social media and website updates.

DBCA's *Nearer to Nature* education programs aim to teach children about the nature of Western Australia and its management and conservation in consideration of the Western Australian school curriculum. The content will be updated to cover the concepts of climate change impacts on the forest and the role of ecological thinning. This will include the development of a publicly accessible internet application that will be a useful resource for teachers to access in their classrooms for children statewide to learn about south-west forests.

DBCA's FMP Team email will continue to actively monitor forestinfo@dbca.wa.gov.au and respond to enquiries received.

³ Legitimate forest products that have been sourced subject to the FMP may be confirmed by the Forest Products Commission [fpcfindatimbersupplierinfosheet.pdf](https://www.wa.gov.au/fpcfindatimbersupplierinfosheet.pdf) (www.wa.gov.au).