



Draft Forest Management Plan 2024–2033

Fact sheet: Noongar culture and heritage values



Photo Noongar rangers participating in a pre-burn survey.

The Noongar people are traditional owners of the south-west region of Western Australia and the area covered by the *Forest Management Plan 2024-2033*.

The Noongar Nation is one of the largest Aboriginal cultural blocks in Australia and Noongar people have a profound physical and spiritual connection with their boodjar (land/country).

Noongar spirituality

Under Noongar lore and customs, Noongar people have responsibilities for looking after boodjar and everything within it. This responsibility was handed down from the Nyidiny or creation times, which means 'cold', 'ice age', or 'ancestral times'. It is the time before time, when spirits rose from the earth and descended from the sky to create the landforms and all living things.

Everything in the vast landscape has meaning and purpose. Life is a web of inter-relationships where maaman and yok (men and women) and nature are partners, and where koora (past) is always connected to yeyi (present).

Noongar people pay respect to their ancestral creators through rituals, paintings, music and midar (dance). Connection to country also signifies a close relationship with spiritual beings associated with the land. For Noongar people, the spirits of their ancestors live in the djarilmari (forests).

Noongar knowledge and land management

Noongar kadidjiny (knowledge) and understanding of boodjar reflects the deep spiritual and physical connection to country and to places of significance. Noongar people have developed, refined and utilised knowledge of the natural environment for tens of thousands of years, and there is a duty to pass on kadidjiny to the next generation.

Noongar people have traditionally hunted and gathered food according to their six bonar (seasons): Birak, Bunuru/Boonaroo, Djeran, Makuru/Mookaroo, Djilba, and Kambarang. The bonar are based on weather patterns and which resources are plentiful during those times. Noongar people have always practised sustainable harvest strategies to ensure the survival of the species they depend on for food, water and medicine.

Noongar Traditional Owners have long used fire for different purposes such as cleaning country, clearing paths, encouraging new vegetation growth, propagating seeds, hunting, cooking, warmth, light, making tools, signalling, ceremonies, protection and for managing the land. Burning with a fire regime appropriate to seasons and forest type reduced the risk of large bushfires, encouraged the growth of bush tucker and medicines, and provided forage for native animals. Cultural burning is based on the principles of Right Fire, Right Time, Right Way and for the Right Reasons.

New cooperative and joint management partnerships present exciting land management opportunities, meaning the south-west forests are cared for using Noongar and Western methods.



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Sites of significance

A large number of Aboriginal cultural sites have been recorded within the south-west forests. These are places of importance and significance to Noongar people and to the cultural heritage of the State. They are significant because they link Noongar cultural tradition to place, land and people over time.

All Aboriginal sites are protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972* (AH Act). The *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021* (once enacted) will replace the AH Act and offer improved protection for significant sites and Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Important cultural sites in the planning area include:

- mythological and ceremonial sites connected to Nyidiny
- artefact sites
- fish and hunting places
- painting and engraving sites where Noongar people painted or engraved on surfaces such as rocks, rock walls and trees
- burial sites
- scarred trees modified by Noongar people by removing the bark or wood for the making of tools or other materials used in cultural practices
- birth, camping, rock shelters and meeting places
- water sources such as soaks, springs and rock holes.

Customary activities and enjoyment of boodjar

For the majority of traditional owners, there is a desire to continue living on country from time to time, learning about and enjoying important areas of the forests and utilising the resources of boodjar. Noongar people have retained their hunting and gathering traditions and wish to continue these practices and pass them on to their children.

For example, Noongar people regard yongka (kangaroo) meat as an essential part of their diet and certain parts of the kangaroo are used for medicine. Kangaroo hunting also forms an important part of teaching Noongar ways and culture to young people. By practising customary activities, present and future generations can transfer knowledge and ensure that Noongar culture remains strong.

For a long time, conservation reserves and regulations prohibited Noongar peoples' use of the forests for their traditional pursuits. Today, provisions of the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* (CALM Act) enable Aboriginal people to access country and undertake customary activities, such as hunting and gathering food and medicine, camping outside designated camping sites, and engaging in artistic or ceremonial activities. While most customary activities can be carried out without impacting on biodiversity and public safety, regulations exist that restrict customary activities where there are risks to public safety and flora and fauna values.

Further reading

For more information on Noongar culture and heritage values refer to Kaartdijin Noongar <https://www.noongarculture.org.au/noongar-lore/>



The management of Western Australia's south-west forests will be outlined in the *Forest Management Plan 2024–2033*.

For more information visit our website at dbca.wa.gov.au/forest-management-plan