



CORPORATE POLICY STATEMENT NO. 19

FIRE MANAGEMENT

August 2023

1. OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Minimise negative impacts on communities and the natural environment from bushfires on lands managed by the department.
- 1.2 Apply and manage fire in the landscape to provide for effective mitigation of bushfire risk and contribute to the management of conservation, biodiversity and Aboriginal cultural heritage values.

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; 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*.

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 Regulation 45 of the Bush Fires Regulations 1954.

3. CONTEXT

Western Australia's climate and vegetation make it naturally prone to bushfires, which occur regularly across much of the State. Through its Parks and Wildlife Service, the department is responsible for managing fire on approximately 26.9 million hectares of department-managed lands, including national parks, State forests, and other reserves. The department also contributes to bushfire risk mitigation actions on approximately 91.4 million hectares of unallocated Crown land and unmanaged reserves.

Bushfires can have adverse impacts on the wellbeing of people and communities, public and private assets, biodiversity, heritage, critical infrastructure, public enjoyment and amenity, and economic activity. Collectively, this uncertainty or potential for adverse impacts is termed 'bushfire-related risk'.

The impacts of bushfire on the environment vary depending on the season, scale, intensity, and frequency. Many of Western Australia's native ecosystems have evolved with fire. The resilience and function of these ecosystems are often supported by varying the scale, seasonality, frequency, and intensity of fire occurrence, within acceptable ranges, to create an appropriate mosaic of vegetation stages, types, and structures across the landscape.

The potential scale and impact of bushfires on human communities and the environment can be significantly reduced through the application of scientific knowledge and professional judgement when selecting, planning, and conducting prescribed burns and other bushfire mitigation actions and determining appropriate strategies for bushfire control.

The department is committed to responding to bushfires across the State where direct management intervention is required and where it can do so, consistent with the principal responsibility to respond to bushfires burning on or near lands for which it has legislated management responsibility.

Parks and Wildlife Service's fire management activities, related to both planned and unplanned fire events, take bushfire-related risk into account when determining appropriate management regimes to minimise risk from bushfire on lands managed by the department on social, economic, environmental, and cultural or heritage values.

4. STANDARDS

The standards for Parks and Wildlife Service fire management are detailed in the department's bushfire incident preparedness, response and suppression doctrine, 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;
- *Bush Fires Act 1954*;
- Bush Fires Regulations 1954;
- *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*;
- Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2018;
- *Environmental Protection Act 1986*;
- *Emergency Management Act 2005*; and
- *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cwth).

6. POLICY

The department will ensure that its planning, preparations, and response to bushfire incidents is consistent with its legislated responsibilities as a land manager and as detailed in *State Hazard Plan - Fire*.¹

6.1 Capability and Capacity

The department will maintain a bushfire management capability and capacity ensuring a state of readiness to respond to bushfire incidents commensurate with the appropriate state of fire management readiness, based on risk assessment outcomes and the availability of resources from other agencies.

The department will develop and maintain a workforce that is highly mobile, appropriately trained, competent, and fit for work with access to information and knowledge about the environment and behaviour that will facilitate the effective and safe management of bushfire.

The department will continue to maintain an effective system of roads, fire access tracks, airstrips, and helipads to provide access for firefighting vehicles/aircraft and to provide a fuel-free environment for personnel from which fire management activities can be safely implemented.

6.2 Engagement

Bushfire has the potential to affect all Western Australians. Bushfire risk mitigation and active fire management are responsibilities shared by the government and community.

The department will communicate and consult with key stakeholders, local government, traditional owners, industry, and community interest groups.

Effective engagement acknowledges the legitimate interests, knowledge, and experience of internal and external stakeholders. The department values the relationships and partnerships across the State that assist with managing and sharing responsibility for the integration of bushfire response and management.

6.3 Bushfire Mitigation

Appropriate bushfire mitigation strategies will be considered and applied with the intent to reduce the risk, severity, and impact of bushfires on life, property community, environment, cultural and heritage values and industry. The department will facilitate community awareness of the rationale for the application of its prescribed burning program and non-fire fuel management treatments.

The department will build positive working relationships to deliver positive fire management outcomes, engendering inter-generational transfer of cultural knowledge, and enabling Aboriginal people to be back on country and caring for country.

¹ The *State Hazard Plan - Fire 2022* (the Plan) provides an overview of arrangements for the management of fire in Western Australia and contains information on fire prevention, preparedness, response, and initial recovery. The Fire and Emergency Services (FES) Commissioner, is the Hazard Management Agency (HMA) for fire

6.3.1 Prescribed Burning

Prescribed burning is the primary fuel management tool used by the department to mitigate against bushfire risk, and for the maintenance or improvement of ecosystem health, particularly where 'non-fire' based fuel management actions are not achievable or practical at the scale necessary.

6.3.2 Mechanical Fuel Modification

Where appropriate, the department will consider and apply the use of 'non-fire' treatment methods to alter vegetation structure to assist with the achievement of land management and bushfire mitigation objectives. This is most likely to be applied where it results in enhanced burn boundary security and safety for fire ground personnel; or where fuels are elevated with a discontinuous ground fuel layer where the unmodified vegetation would typically only burn under less manageable fire conditions.

6.4 Bushfire Suppression

The department employs, develops, and maintains skilled fire management personnel to effectively respond to bushfires in a manner appropriate to the context of each situation.

Across the department's south-west forest regions, the maintenance of an early detection and response capability to bushfires will assist in limiting bushfire size, intensity, and negative impacts on communities and the natural environment.

The scale of the response will consider the values at risk, the prevailing and forecast weather, the availability of resources, and cost-effectiveness.

Where predicted impacts of a bushfire are low; or where resources are limited, the application of an observation and monitoring of fire activity strategy may be adopted ahead of applying active suppression actions.

Suppression strategies will consider the protection of environmental and other values following relevant departmental guidelines, procedures, and management plans.

The department will provide resources to coordinate and manage bushfire response in collaboration with other organisations that have fire management responsibilities, with its roles and responsibilities following applicable legislation, State Hazard Plan – Fire, inter-agency arrangements, and the department's Good Neighbour Policy and Guideline.

6.5 Bushfire Cause Investigation

The department will attempt to identify the origin and cause of bushfires on lands under its control and will investigate fires that result in death or injury and/or damage to private or community property. Where it is determined that an offence has occurred, the department will take all necessary actions to assist in the identification and, as appropriate, prosecution of offenders.

The department will work closely with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), the Western Australian Police Force's Arson Squad, and local government authorities to support arson prevention programs.

6.6 Bushfire Research and Knowledge

The department is committed to enhancing and innovating bushfire management practices through learnings from past incidents and a systematic, science-based approach to better understand and increase 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 and operational practice that may improve bushfire management.

The department is committed to the process of continuous learning to improve the safety, effectiveness, and efficiency of its bushfire management business and will pursue collaborative arrangements and opportunities to participate in or deliver integrated training programs with DFES and other fire authorities and organisations.

7. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

- 7.1 The **Director General** is responsible for the effective response to bushfire occurring on department-managed lands, ensuring that the resources and appropriate authorities are in place to enable policy implementation. Assisted by the Executive Director, Regional and Fire Management Services, the Director General may delegate specific accountabilities and responsibilities concerning bushfire incident management and the acceptance of risk to personnel.
- 7.2 The **Executive Director Regional and Fire Management Services** is responsible for the effective implementation of the policy; ensuring that personnel involved in bushfire incident management have the necessary competencies, delegations, and resources to comply with the department's standards and ensuring the correct functioning of critical controls. The Executive Director may delegate specific accountabilities and responsibilities concerning prescribed burning and acceptance of risk to other personnel.
- 7.3 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 concerning bushfire incident management; 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.
- 7.4 **Managers** are responsible for applying and complying with standards, procedures, and documents relating bushfire incident management in their areas of responsibility and monitoring the correct functioning and ongoing applicability of risk controls.
- 7.5 All personnel are responsible for understanding and fulfilling their obligations and specific functions concerning 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. KEYWORDS

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

11. REVIEW

This policy is to be reviewed no later than August 2028.

12. DIRECTOR GENERAL APPROVAL

Approved by



Stuart Smith
DIRECTOR GENERAL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Date: 8 August 2023