



# Planned burning

## INFORMATION SHEET

Fire is a natural part of our landscape but it needs to be managed to protect people, property and the environment. The Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) is one of three key organisations involved with bushfire management in Tasmania. This includes suppressing wildfires, implementing planned burns and preparing strategic and reserve-based fire management plans.

### What is planned burning?

Planned burning is more than just fuel management. It is also known as prescribed or hazard reduction burning and uses fire as a land management tool in a very controlled way to protect communities and manage habitat.

### Why does the PWS undertake planned burning?

Planned burning is among a range of vegetation management practices and falls into three categories:

- Safeguarding built, natural, cultural and heritage assets.
- Maintaining biodiversity and special habitats for fauna and regenerating plants.
- Reducing the risk of large wildfires.

A range of intensities, frequencies, seasons and scales of burning are incorporated into ecologically-based fire regimes to optimise biodiversity conservation.

Reduced fuel levels lower the potential damage of uncontrolled bushfires by slowing the spread of a fire, reducing the risk of spot fires, providing safe places to fight the fire and making fires easier to control. Planned burning requires sound planning and management to ensure employee and public safety, and to minimise the risk of fire escaping and/or not meeting the burn objectives.

### How are burning priorities determined?

Areas to be burned are identified through formal planning processes. Ecological habitats may be targeted by



a threatened species recovery plan or fire management strategy. Every burn must pass through an environmental impact assessment that includes consultation with experts.

PWS strategic fire management plans are underpinned by a risk assessment process which identifies the potential and consequences of damaging bushfire for the whole of Tasmania. Burning to protect communities where the likelihood of a major wildfire is highest and the consequences extreme is given the highest priority.

### Where does the PWS burn?

The comprehensive PWS burning program includes areas within reserves across most of the state. While the focus is on protecting communities in the most fire-prone environments, and to strategic fuel management corridors, ecological burns in remote wilderness areas ensure critical habitat is maintained for threatened species, such as the orange-bellied parrot.

Burning is undertaken only in vegetation that is well adapted to cope with fire, such as dry eucalypt forest, heathlands and buttongrass plains.

## When is the best time to burn?

If the right conditions are present, the PWS will burn at any time of year. However the majority of burns are undertaken in autumn when periods of stable weather provide the most ecologically sustainable and safest times to burn. A burn will be approved only if optimum weather conditions are expected to continue for at least a few days. Consideration is also given to minimising the impact of smoke on communities.

Spring is breeding time and disturbances may impact on the survival of young.

Spring burning can also be risky with smouldering material having to be managed into the warmer and more volatile periods of late-spring and summer. Tasmania has a history of devastating bushfires occurring as early as October.

Burning conditions can be marginal in winter. Shorter daylight periods impact on dryness of vegetation and in most instances a fire can get started but can't be sustained. A planned burn that does not fully achieve its objectives is a waste of time and money.

## How many burns does the PWS undertake?

Up to 120 burns are planned for any given fire season but over the last five years PWS has achieved an average of 35 planned burns each season.

## How is the smoke problem managed?

Smoke from bushfires has been a feature of the Australian environment for thousands of years and the ignition of any burn will result in smoke being released into the atmosphere. PWS treats seriously its responsibilities about smoke and a separate fact sheet has been prepared explaining smoke management.

## How big are the areas selected for burning?

Block size is highly variable. In specific asset protection zones close to communities, burns range from 5 to 200 hectares. Strategic fuel management burns can be several thousand hectares while some ecological burns may be as small as one or two hectares.

## Is there a plan for each burn?

A burn plan must be prepared, peer reviewed and authorised before any work on a burn can commence. The plan also details issues identified by the environmental impact assessment, notifications, smoke management strategies, pre-burn fuel assessments and weather monitoring, maps of the burn area and operational information.

## What is unbounded burning and why does the PWS do it?

Unbounded burning occurs mostly in the remote parts of Tasmania. Using a helicopter-mounted aerial incendiary machine, several thousand hectares of fire-adapted vegetation can be burnt in a single day. Weather conditions are carefully monitored so only target vegetation will be burnt such as buttongrass plains. By burning in benign autumn conditions, there is no penetration into the fire-sensitive vegetation like rainforest and alpine species which are usually too wet to burn.

## What resources are required for a burn?

Planned burns vary in size and complexity. Simple burns need three to four people to manage the operation, but others, such as those in high-risk areas, may need up to 40 people. The Tasmania Fire Service and Forestry Tasmania often provide extra staff and equipment to assist PWS, particularly for planned burns near townships.

The range of equipment and vehicles includes drip torches to light the burn, four-wheel-drive vehicles with water tanks, flamethrowers, aerial incendiary machines, beaters to manage edges in buttongrass, helicopters, boats, hoses and pump relays.

## How are people and communities notified about burning?

The PWS recognises the importance of informing local communities when burns are planned for their areas.

A burning program for each region helps to identify specific community groups, commercial operators, agricultural interests, neighbours and others to be engaged during the planning process.

Notification areas and specific groups, such as wine growers, are identified and sent an indicative list of burns that may be conducted in their growing regions during a season.

In the weeks leading up to a burn, notices are distributed to inform communities that a burn is imminent in their area.

In the day or two prior to ignition there may be radio announcements, a letterbox drop and door-knocking to ensure burn block neighbours are fully aware. In urban environments mass media is an effective means of reaching people. All burns are listed on the PWS website at least 24 hours prior to ignition. The status of each burn is updated daily.