



CORPORATE POLICY STATEMENT NO. 19

FIRE MANAGEMENT

July 2015

1. OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 To ensure that the risk of adverse impacts on communities, visitors, and built and natural assets from bushfires on lands managed by the Department of Parks and Wildlife are as low as reasonably practical.
- 1.2 To implement appropriate fire regimes to maintain or improve ecosystem health and resilience, or achieve other land and wildlife management outcomes, in partnership with other fire authorities, stakeholders and the community and in accordance with the international risk management standard.

2. SCOPE

This policy is applicable to the department's management of land that is classified in the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* (CALM Act) as a State forest; a timber reserve; a national park; a conservation park; a nature reserve; land referred to in section 5(1)(g) and vested in the Conservation Commission of Western Australia (Conservation Commission); land referred to in section 5(1)(h) and under the care, control and management of the Conservation Commission; 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 CALM Act land. This policy is also applicable to land managed by the department under the *Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006* (SCRM) Act. These lands are referred to as SCRM Act land. The bushfire prevention aspects of this policy are applicable to unallocated Crown land and unmanaged reserves outside the metropolitan area, regional centres and townsites. Aspects of the policy related to the powers conferred on CALM Act officers by section 45 of the *Bush Fires Act 1954* are applicable to land listed in section 45 of the Bush Fires Regulations 1954.

3. CONTEXT

Climate and flammable vegetation have ensured that bushfires have been a natural component of most Western Australian ecosystems for tens of thousands of years.

Aboriginal use of fire has and continues to be planned to produce specific outcomes. In areas prone to bushfire, many native species have evolved traits that enable them to persist with fire. Many plants depend upon fire for regeneration while many animals depend upon fire for their habitat. However, there are some ecosystems that are independent of fire (non-flammable) and some plants and animals that occur in less fire-prone habitats that require long fire-free intervals.

The impacts of fire on the environment vary, depending on the fire regime – defined by the frequency, intensity, season and scale of fires. Sound fire management must take account of the variable responses of species and ecosystems to different fire regimes.

Bushfires also present a risk to communities, including human lives, homes, public and private infrastructure, amenity, cultural and heritage values.

Parks and Wildlife's fire management activities, related to both planned and unplanned fire events, aim to take account of these issues in meeting the joint objectives of minimising harm to the community and managing the land and wildlife values in its care.

Prescribed burning is an important strategy for reducing bushfire-related risk and for maintaining or improving ecosystem health. Details of Parks and Wildlife's use of planned fire can be found in Corporate Policy Statement No. 88 – Prescribed fire.

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. Fire management is considered during the development of management plans prepared by the department for the Conservation Commission.

However, bushfires do not distinguish between land tenures and fire management must involve all State government agencies with fire or land management responsibilities, local government authorities, and private land managers working collaboratively to achieve agreed objectives.

This policy is consistent with and recognises the requirements contained in other relevant Parks and Wildlife policies, and should be read in conjunction with Corporate Policy Statement 88 - Prescribed Fire.

4. LEGISLATION

Legislation relevant to this policy includes:

- *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984;*
- *Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006;*
- *Bush Fires Act 1954;*
- *Bush Fires Regulations 1954;*
- *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950;*
- *Environmental Protection Act 1986;* and
- *Emergency Management Act 2005.*

In the interest of containing bushfires in Western Australia as early as possible, the State Emergency Management Plan for Fire (WESTPLAN – Fire) requires that the controlling agency that is best placed in terms of location, resources and expertise is to initially respond to a bushfire incident, irrespective of location or land tenure. Subsequent control responsibilities will be achieved in accordance with WESTPLAN – Fire and relevant provisions of the *Bush Fires Act 1954*.

5. POLICY

5.1 Safety and risk management

Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity. The protection of human life and built and natural assets will be undertaken in accordance with the principles of risk management.

5.2 Capability and capacity

5.2.1 Readiness

The department will ensure it is in an appropriate state of fire readiness, based on risk assessment outcomes and the availability of resources from other agencies. Resources will be mobile and personnel will be fit and competent for the roles they undertake.

5.2.2 Suppression capacity

The department will maintain its fire management, suppression and response capability, including personnel, equipment and aircraft. This requires an adequate state of readiness and standards of fire suppression relative to the values at risk, and to the difficulty of controlling fires in a safe and cost-effective manner.

5.3 Prescribed fire

Prescribed fire will be used to achieve a range of land management objectives as described in Corporate Policy Statement No. 88 – Prescribed fire and relevant Parks and Wildlife strategies, policies, management plans and other documents. The objectives for each prescribed fire, and the methods used to achieve them, will be specified in individual prescribed fire plans.

5.4 Bushfire suppression

5.4.1 Detection

In high bushfire risk or high value areas, the department will maintain fire detection and fire reporting systems that will give timely and accurate warning of bushfires threatening community or built or natural assets. Lesser detection and reporting systems will apply in other areas.

5.4.2 Response

The department will respond to bushfires occurring on or near CALM Act and SCRM Act lands at a scale that is appropriate to the values at risk, the prevailing and forecast weather, the availability of resources, and that is cost effective. In circumstances where impacts of the bushfire are likely to be low or resources are limited, the response may be to observe and monitor, rather than actively suppress.

5.4.3 Control

The department will take control of, or provide assistance to other controlling agencies, in accordance with relevant legislation, WESTPLAN – Fire, inter-agency arrangements and the Good Neighbour Policy.

5.4.4 Access

The department will maintain an effective system of roads, fire access tracks, airstrips and helipads to provide access and safety for firefighters.

5.4.5 Environment

The department will fully consider the protection of environmental and other values in determining strategies for fire suppression in accordance with relevant departmental guidelines, procedures and management plans.

5.5 Bushfire mitigation

5.5.1 Prevention

The department will plan and conduct bushfire mitigation activities to minimise the incidence and impact of bushfires.

5.5.2 Identify fire cause

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 the law has been breached, the department will take actions to identify and, as appropriate, recommend prosecution of offenders.

5.5.3 Arson

The department does not have jurisdictional responsibility for initiatives for arson prevention. However, the department will work closely with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), the Police Arson Squad and local government authorities in developing and implementing coordinated arson prevention programs.

5.6 Consultation and liaison

5.6.1 Consultation

The department recognises the legitimate interests, knowledge and experience of internal and external stakeholders. It will regularly communicate and consult with key stakeholders, including the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, DFES, local governments, traditional owners, industry and community interest groups in relation to its fire management responsibilities.

5.6.2 Collaboration

The department will participate with other State agencies and local government authorities in developing approaches to bushfire risk mitigation, including in peri-urban areas. Parks and Wildlife will carry out its fire management role in partnership with other relevant agencies, primarily DFES, the Forest Products Commission, local government authorities and volunteer bush fire brigades.

5.7 Research and knowledge

The department will conduct, collaborate in, sponsor and monitor research into fire behaviour, ecology and operational practice that contributes to the improvement of fire management.

6. STANDARDS

Risk assessment and the selection of risk treatments will be undertaken as part of all decision-making associated with fire management in a manner consistent with the risk management process specified in the standard: AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009 Risk Management: Principles and guidelines.

The standards for Parks and Wildlife fire management are detailed in the department's code of practice for fire management, prescribed fire manual, bushfire preparedness and response manual, relevant standard operating procedures, and management plans prepared by the department for the Conservation Commission.

The arrangements for prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery relating to bushfires in Western Australia, to be implemented by state agencies and local government authorities are outlined in WESTPLAN – Fire.

7. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- 7.1 The **Director General** is responsible for approval of this policy, determining the department's risk management framework, risk criteria, ensuring that the resources and authorities are in place to enable the policy to be implemented and, assisted by the Director Regional and Fire Management Services, monitoring "very high" risk, the correct functioning of critical controls and the effective implementation of the policy. The Director General may delegate specific accountabilities and responsibilities in relation to fire management and the acceptance of risk to other staff but will monitor the related performance of those staff.
- 7.2 The **Director Regional and Fire Management Services** is accountable to the Director General for ensuring that those staff involved in fire management have the necessary competencies, delegations and resources to comply with the department's standards and to maximise the achievement of fire management objectives. The Director may delegate specific accountabilities and responsibilities in relation to fire management and the acceptance of risk to other staff but will monitor the related performance of those staff.
- 7.3 The **Manager Fire Management Services Branch** is responsible for developing, maintaining and for ensuring implementation of the department's policies, standards, procedures, guidelines and other requirements in relation to fire management, establishing and maintaining a system to monitor officer competence as well as district and regional preparedness and capacity, and will be responsible for all technical matters relating to the department's fire management programs.
- 7.4 **Managers** (including the Manager Fire Management Services Branch and Directors) are responsible for applying and complying with standards, procedures and documents relating to fire management in their areas of responsibility and for monitoring the correct functioning and ongoing applicability of risk controls.
- 7.5 **Employees** will fulfil their respective responsibilities in relation to this policy.

8. CUSTODIAN

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; prescribed fire; fire management; fire management policy; bushfire-related risk; risk assessment; firefighter; arson.

11. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed no later than July 2018.

12. DIRECTOR GENERAL APPROVAL

Approved by



Jim Sharp
DIRECTOR GENERAL

Effective date: 27 July 2015