



Draft forest management plan 2014–2023 and ecosystem health

The health of the forest can be affected by changes in the intensity and frequency of bushfires, or climate change; weeds, pests and diseases; and disturbances such as timber harvesting or land clearing for infrastructure and mining projects.

Lightning strikes mean that fire occurs naturally in the south-west and is important in many processes, including regeneration of native vegetation, germination and the release of nutrients needed for plant growth. Large, intense bushfires, however, threaten life and property and altered fire regimes can be detrimental to biodiversity.

The Draft plan recognises that healthy ecosystems are more resilient to pressures such as climate change, and therefore one of the key goals is to maintain ecosystem health and vitality. This is proposed through a range of measures, including:

- The Department of Environment and Conservation's (DEC) roles and responsibilities for fire management are set out in the Draft plan, including the framework for planning, implementing and reviewing its prescribed burning program. As well as maintaining a competent capability in prescribed fire management, bushfire risk mitigation, detection and suppression, the Draft plan proposes that DEC will further develop community understanding and collaboration in fire management.
- Maintaining DEC's *Western Shield* program, the biggest wildlife conservation program undertaken in Australia. This statewide program began in the jarrah forest in 1996 to control feral predators (especially foxes and feral cats) so native animals could return to their former abundance in areas where they remained and be reintroduced to former habitats from which they had disappeared.
- Maintaining surveillance and recording systems for forest diseases known to have a significant impact on ecosystem health and vitality. This includes continuing to review the approach to managing dieback disease, such as mapping standards, risk assessment and approval processes, operational controls and the supervision applied, and the training provided to those working in susceptible areas.
- Greater protection will be given to trees or groups of trees that show resistance to pests or disease during timber harvesting operations, under changes proposed to the jarrah silviculture guidelines. As well as helping to maintain the health of the patches where these trees occur, they may be used as breeding stock to re-populate affected areas.
- Continuing to regulate the use of heavy vehicles to protect soil during timber harvesting and other disturbance operations.
- The Draft plan proposes a renewed focus to prioritise research and management efforts for pests and diseases in line with the approach that DEC has adopted for weeds. This is a risk-based approach to identify outbreaks of high impact weeds that are still small enough to eradicate or contain, and areas of high conservation value where weed control is likely to have the greatest benefit.

- As many of the threats to forest health cross property boundaries, the Draft plan seeks a coordinated approach by all land managers, including government agencies, local governments, private landholders and all land users.
- The plan also sets out proposed operations (management activities) to promote the rehabilitation of areas of native vegetation cleared during planned disturbance operations, such as mining and extraction of basic raw materials.

The *Draft Forest Management Plan 2014-2023* is available at www.conservation.wa.gov.au and is open for public comment until 7 November 2012.



Department of
Environment and Conservation

