

# Planned burning: landscape fuel-reduction burns for asset and ecosystem protection

## Background

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Landscape fuel-reduction burns are undertaken in vegetation that is fire-dependent, and aim to not only reduce fuel loads but also promote the ecological health of these communities. For example, buttongrass moorland requires frequent fire in order to maintain species diversity. Buttongrass moorland can be burnt throughout most of the year when the soils are saturated, however, when soils are dry, for example in summer, the soils can also burn, which leads to their degradation. Therefore, buttongrass is targeted for burning when the soil is wet, reducing the fuel loads, promoting biodiversity of the moorland, protecting the soil, and reducing the chance of future bushfires impacting on fire-sensitive vegetation that is often found adjacent to the moorlands.

Landscape fuel-reduction burns occur within remote areas of the TWWHA and are effective at stopping the spread of large bushfires as they break up the fuel load. This creates natural barriers to fire progression and increases the chance of firefighters controlling a bushfire.



## Challenges

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The challenges for landscape fuel-reduction burning include climate change decreasing the windows of opportunity in which planned burning can be completed, and competition for resources when weather conditions for burning are suitable.

In recent years there has been a focus on asset-protection burning as part of the statewide Fuel Reduction Program, with priorities placed on protecting built assets and community infrastructure. However, strategic landscape fuel-reduction burning can contribute significantly to the protection of built assets as well as natural and cultural values, and is an important part of land management. Therefore, resources need to be devoted to landscape fuel-reduction burning as well as asset-protection burning as this assists in the overall asset protection strategy and is an important land management tool.

We do not always have detailed information on the ecological responses to planned burning. Some people suggest that until we do, we should not be undertaking any planned burns; however, it needs to be acknowledged that choosing **not to do** something is just as much of a decision with consequences as choosing **to do** something. Research continues into the appropriate fire regimes (fire frequency, size, intensity and season) required to promote healthy ecosystems, however this work is ongoing.

Landscape fuel reduction-burning relies on fuel moisture differentials between vegetation communities and/or evening humidity and temperature changes to extinguish the fire. These conditions typically occur in spring and autumn. However, there are risks associated with using natural barriers and weather conditions to extinguish a fire and some escapes are likely to occur from time to time. In recent history, any impact from these escapes has been minimal. Currently, there is broad community support for fuel-reduction burning and understanding of the limitations and risks. Without community support, the Parks and Wildlife Service and other fire agencies would have significant barriers to undertaking planned burning. Some of these barriers include the level of planning and approval required, which is already significant, as well as burning prescriptions being too narrow, which limits opportunities to undertake burns. The key to an effective burning program is to define an acceptable level of risk in order to be as effective as possible.



## The way forward

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Balance the level of resources devoted to landscape and asset-protection burning.

Identify strategic landscape fuel-reduction zones and maintain a planned burning program to achieve asset protection and the conservation of fire-dependent ecosystems.

Continue to research the fire regimes best suited to communities throughout the TWWHA.

Communicate the successes of the planned burning program, including temporary onsite interpretation signs, to highlight the benefits of burning.

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### OTHER ISSUES SHEETS THAT MAY BE OF INTEREST

- 01 Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area fire management objectives
- 02 Fuel-reduction burning
- 04 Planned burning: use of fuel-reduction burns for ecosystem maintenance
- 05 Aboriginal burning

