Strategic bushfire
management plan

Alpine and Greater Gippsland

**OVERVIEW**

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The Alpine and Greater Gippsland Strategic Bushfire Management Plan outlines the fuel management strategy that the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Parks Victoria (PV) will implement on public land.

Managing bushfire fuels on public land is a key way of protecting our communities and our natural environment. When shrubs, bark and leaf litter that fuel bushfires are reduced we can decrease the intensity of bushfires and control them more easily. Planned burning is the main way we reduce fuel on large areas of public land.

The type, quantity and arrangement of bushfire fuel is different in each landscape, and our actions need to be tailored accordingly

DELWP undertakes strategic bushfire management planning, which includes working with multiple agencies and local communities to understand what they value in their landscape, to make sure our fuel management strategy meets the needs of local communities.

With the help of communities we have identified values in the landscape that need protection from bushfire, and used sophisticated computer simulations to tell us how bushfires spread, based on factors like vegetation, weather and terrain. The modelling tells us where to reduce fuel hazard in the places where the most damaging bushfires are likely to start and spread.

This plan brings together knowledge from local communities, fire agencies, and best available science and technology. The result is a fuel management strategy that guides on-ground operations to the most effective places to reduce risk. The strategy also takes into account the effects of fire on ecosystems.

There will always be bushfire risk in the Alpine and Greater Gippsland landscape. The nature of this risk will change over time, as bushfires occur in the landscape and alter the fuel loads, as science and technology advances, and people move in and out of landscapes. Our approach must continually improve and adapt to ensure our actions target where the risk is, and they are appropriate for the local environment.

While we can never completely eliminate bushfire risk, we can reduce and manage it in many ways. Managing fuel on public land is just one way of reducing risk, and land and fire agencies will work in partnership with local communities to find the right mix of risk reduction strategies.

As a first step, in 2016 we will build on this plan to manage bushfire fuels across public and private land.

Sophisticated and detailed

By using the best available information about the landscape to run modelled simulations, we can identify where we will get the greatest risk-reduction benefits from fuel management. We also know which areas to exclude from the planned burning program to protect ecosystems and other valuable parts of the landscape. We use fire management zones to specify where and how frequently we will burn. We can also adjust the way we burn, from low intensity burns in sensitive areas to more intense burns where suitable.

Threatened species

The Colquhoun grevillea is endemic to a small area of our landscape. It is classified as a threatened species under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. Too much fire in its habitat can cause damage to this species. Under our fuel management strategy, we aim to meet the needs of this threatened species by extending the time between planned burning to ten years, which is a more suitable frequency for this grevillea.

High value ecosystem areas

Our landscape has over 29,000 hectares of fire-sensitive vegetation communities listed as having conservation importance, including Alpine sphagnum bogs, littoral rainforest and coastal vine thickets and Alpine snowpatch. These communities are often in small, isolated patches which makes protection from bushfire more difficult. We aim to minimise impact of planned burning on these areas by incorporating environmental value requirements in our fuel management planning, and identifying potential conflicts between our intended planning burning program and environmental values.

High Risk Areas

The map shows our fuel management strategy. Our modelling shows us where to locate our fuel management activities so that they have the greatest impact in reducing bushfire risk.

We protect essential infrastructure by placing fire management zones near assets such as the Esso gas pipeline, which supplies Melbourne with gas. The social and economic importance of the pipeline was demonstrated by the disruption to Melbourne’s gas supply after the 1998 Longford gas explosion. We do the same with the Princes Highway to reduce the risk of disruption to this important transport link.

 North-south corridors of bushfire moderation zones break up the landscape, helping us to suppress bushfires and minimise large, landscape-scale bushfires. We have placed more bushfire moderation zones in key bushfire catchments, to reduce the risk of frequent or high-consequence bushfires.

 The Brush-tailed rock-wallaby is considered critically endangered in Victoria. The largest remaining Victorian colony of 20-30 animals lives in the Little River Gorge. Under our fuel management strategy, the rock-wallaby colony and surrounding areas are placed in a landscape management zone, which gives us the opportunity to reduce fuel in areas surrounding the colony to reduce risk from large, intense bushfires. It also allows us to do trials or to exclude burning until we better understand the implications of planned burning on the rock-wallaby.

 We have many landscape management zones which focus on maintaining and improving ecosystem resilience, while providing some risk reduction outcomes. When planning treatments in landscape management zones, we consider the diversity of vegetation growth stages across the landscape.

Continuous Improvement

Implicit in a high-quality strategic approach is a commitment to continuous improvement. The processes used to develop this plan build on and improve what has gone before, and bushfire management will continue to evolve with advances in science, technology and how we engage with the community.

To further improve our approach in future, this plan includes actions to measure and report on our progress and the impacts of our activities on communities, businesses and ecosystems. Importantly, this includes testing how effective our partnerships with communities and stakeholders are, to build productive, long-lasting and trusting relationships.

Thanks to those who where involved

We thank all those who have given their time to contribute to the process of preparing this plan, including staff and representatives of our department, PV, CFA, local governments, Traditional Owners, water corporations, utility services, private land managers, regional and municipal fire management planning committees, environmental groups and communities in the Alpine and Greater Gippsland landscape.

How to get involved

Our planning process is done all year round and we need the help of local communities to understand what you care about most, and to work with us to determine local solutions.

To find out more about the large body of research and analysis that underlies this plan, or how to be involved in activities to review and update this plan in future, go to www.delwp.vic.gov.au