

Fire and Your Property

This is the fourth Note in the Land for Wildlife fire series that looks at the practicalities involved in planning for fire and reducing the risk of bushfire on your property. This Note is relevant for both landholders who choose to burn vegetation on parts of their property and landholders who choose not to burn. Being fire aware is applicable to all land types including farms, conservation properties, lifestyle blocks and government land. It is best to be prepared for fire and this Note introduces some actions that all landholders can take.

Bushfire Survival Plan

If you live in or near a vegetated area you should be prepared for a fire whether it is planned or unplanned. The Queensland Fire and Emergency Services' Bushfire Survival Plan is part of its PREPARE.ACT.SURVIVE campaign. The Bushfire Survival Plan is your plan of what to do in a bushfire emergency. All landholders who live in or near vegetated areas should prepare a Bushfire Survival Plan (see Further Reading for a website link). The intention of this Note is not to provide advice on a Bushfire Survival Plan, but aims to offer practical advice on fire management planning for your property, regardless of whether you wish to organise a planned burn or not.

Planned Burns on Your Property

There are many different reasons why landholders choose to use fire on their properties, such as reducing fuel loads, promoting pasture and looking after an ecosystem or species. Using fire to reduce and modify the amount of available fuel, with the aim of decreasing the risk and impact of a bushfire is generally called a **hazard reduction burn**. Using fire to reinstate, maintain or manage an ecosystem is generally called an **ecological burn**. Ecological burns have various aims such as:

- Implementing recommended fire regimes.
- Protecting fire sensitive vegetation or refuge areas (e.g. creating a buffer zone around a rainforest).
- Controlling weeds.
- Managing threatened plants and animals.
- Maintaining food resources for wildlife (e.g. grass seeds for finches).

If it is not appropriate, or you do not want to have a planned fire on your property, you can reduce the fire hazard of bushland on your property by reducing fuel loads in your Asset Protection Zone (see next page for an explanation) through:

- Removing fallen leaves and sticks.
- Not having dense, tall gardens close to your home and other infrastructure.
- Regular mowing of grass.
- Grazing livestock in paddocks to reduce high grass fuel loads.



These habitat trees have been protected from a planned burn by having all the leaf litter raked away from the tree base leaving a one metre radius of bare earth. The fire is then lit from the edge of the raked area allowing the fire to burn away from the tree. This prevents the tree from catching alight.

Your Fire Management Plan

One of the best actions that landholders can take is to develop an Individual Property Fire Management Plan (IPFMP). These plans identify what you value on your property and help determine actions to look after those assets. An IPFMP is best developed at a workshop delivered by South East Queensland Fire and Biodiversity Consortium (SEQFBC) in conjunction with Land for Wildlife. Workshops are free and are run regularly, just ask your Land for Wildlife Officer.

At the workshop, you will be provided with maps of your property. On these maps you will identify the things you value such as buildings, dams, waterways, bushland areas, fences, sheds, roads etc. You will also be asked to consider other factors such as aspect, slope, vegetation types (e.g. fire sensitive or fire-adapted, see *Land for Wildlife Note F2* for more information) and your future property plans. Control lines such as tracks, creeks, rock shelves and recently burnt areas will also be mapped onto your IPFMP.

An IPFMP will determine where fire should be excluded (e.g. creeks, rainforest, near buildings) and also where fire-adapted vegetation communities occur and the recommended fire regimes (see *Land for Wildlife Note F1* for more information on fire regimes) for those areas. Your IPFMP will help you determine where and when an ecological or hazard reduction burn could be applied. Your plan may also help you

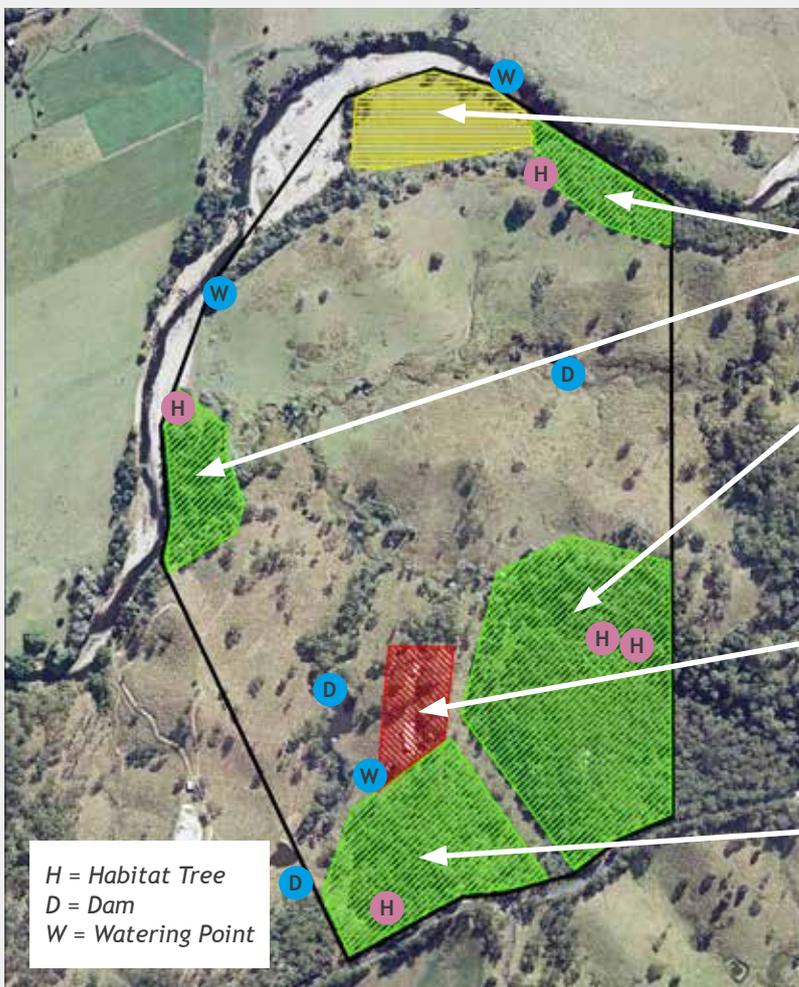


Workshop attendees developing their IPFMP.

prioritise your weed control activities, for example, it is a good time to control lantana soon after a planned burn.

Your IPFMP will break your property into management zones and should link in with your Bushland Management Plan (see *Land for Wildlife Note G3 - Bushland Management Planning*). Wherever possible, work with your neighbours to develop an IPFMP, especially if you have a smaller property.

You are encouraged to discuss your Individual Property Fire Management Plan with your Land for Wildlife Officer. Once you have finalised your plan it is recommended that you submit it to your local Rural Fire Brigade so they have a record of your intentions. Do this even if you do not plan to burn as it is still important for them to know your plans.



A Simplified Individual Property Fire Management Plan Example

Riparian revegetation area.
Exclude fire and stock.

Riparian rainforest with habitat trees.
Exclude fire and stock.

Old regrowth eucalypt forest. Last burnt 32 years ago. Contains habitat trees, a refuge area (gully) and fallen logs. Consider an ecological burn to encourage understorey regeneration, ensuring that habitat trees and logs are protected from fire.

Asset Protection Zone.
Remove fine fuels from around house and sheds, remove fuels from gutters and keep a Bushfire Survival Plan handy.

Regrowth eucalypt forest. Last fire 4 years ago. Consider an ecological burn in 5-10 years time to promote native grasses and control lantana.

H = Habitat Tree
D = Dam
W = Watering Point

Organise Permits Prior to a Burn

If your Individual Property Fire Management Plan recommends a hazard reduction or ecological burn on your property, and you decide that you want to go ahead with a burn, there are several things you must do.

Firstly, you will need to obtain a 'Permit to Light Fire'. In Queensland, the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990* makes it illegal to light a fire larger than two metres without a permit. This permit is issued by a Fire Warden and must be obtained prior to carrying out a planned burn. Contact details for Fire Wardens are available through the Fire Warden Finder on the Rural Fire Service website www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au. A Permit to Light Fire will detail the number of people and resources that must be at the burn, the time frame for the burn to occur and any other criteria such as a certain wind direction and wind speed.

Secondly, discuss your proposed burn with your local Fire Warden or Rural Fire Brigade well before the burn and undertake any necessary actions they recommend.

Thirdly, discuss your proposed burn with your neighbours.

Fourthly, consider and obtain your own personal protective equipment, if you are going to be involved in the burn.

Finally, there may be other legislative obligations when undertaking a planned burn if the fire may affect native vegetation, threatened species or nationally-listed threatened ecological communities. For more detail, refer to SEQFBC's *Living with Fire Factsheet 2*.

Working with Your Rural Fire Brigade

Depending on the conditions in your Permit to Light Fire, you may conduct a planned burn with or without the Rural Fire Brigade. In some areas, there are also private fire management contractors available to assist.

If you are organising the planned burn in conjunction with the Rural Fire Brigade or a private contractor, you need to clearly discuss any conservation considerations that you have on your property well in advance of the burn, such as:

- Creating a mosaic of burnt and unburnt vegetation.
- Ensuring wildlife has escape routes and refuge areas away from fire.
- Protecting habitat trees and habitat logs on the ground.
- Protecting fire sensitive threatened plants or animals.

Be clear with the Rural Fire Brigade or private contractors about areas of your property that you don't want to burn, such as creeks, ridgetops or rainforest patches. Consider joining your local Rural Fire Brigade so that you have the relevant training and gain experience in undertaking planned burns.

Preparing to Undertake a Burn

SEQFBC's *Operational Fire Manual* and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) *Planned Burn Guidelines* have lots of information on the practical aspects of undertaking a planned burn including fire behaviour, placing and management of fire lines, weather considerations, preparation before and after a burn, conducting the fire and mopping-up after the fire. See References for weblinks to these documents.

Patience and Persistence

Once you have all these steps in place and you are ready to undertake the burn, you will have to wait for the right conditions; not too dry, not too wet, not too windy etc. Make sure that you are available on the day of the burn and participate where safe and appropriate. If you are burning in conjunction with your local Rural Fire Brigade be aware that the members of the brigade are volunteers and will most likely be available only on weekends.

After the burn make sure that you have allocated time to undertake any mopping-up duties such as putting out small unwanted fires or smouldering logs. These activities should only be undertaken by trained people with appropriate personal protective equipment. Mopping-up can be dangerous due to falling burnt trees and burnt roots causing the ground to collapse. Again, discuss your post-burn priorities with your Rural Fire Brigade or private contractor well in advance of the burn.



Raking leaf litter away from this fallen habitat tree protected it from burning during a planned burn. Fallen logs like this are important wildlife habitat and, if allowed to burn, may smoulder for weeks causing the log to collapse or sparking new unwanted fire outbreaks.

Being Prepared

Generally spring and early summer are the months to be prepared for fire in Southeast Queensland although fires may occur in any month. Globally, climate change has already started to increase the length of the fire season creating conditions for more intense fires. Climate change is also limiting the preferred conditions for planned burns such as high soil moisture and low temperatures. Developing an Individual Property Fire Management Plan, undertaking the actions within it, and submitting it to your local Rural Fire Brigade will help you prepare your property for both planned and unplanned fires.

What you can do

- ✓ Complete your Bushfire Survival Plan (via the website listed in References).
- ✓ Discuss fire management on your property with your Land for Wildlife Officer.
- ✓ Develop an Individual Property Fire Management Plan by attending a SEQFBC fire and biodiversity workshop.
- ✓ Submit your Individual Property Fire Management Plan to your Rural Fire Brigade.
- ✓ Before any burns remove fuel from around fallen hollow logs, the base of habitat trees and refuge areas.
- ✓ Where possible, avoid burning creeks, gullies and rainforest patches.
- ✓ Monitor and record any planned and unplanned fires on your property.
- ✓ Review your Individual Property Fire Management Plan annually prior to the bushfire season.

References and Further Reading

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services Bushfire Survival Plan (2014)
See www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au/Fire_Safety_and_You/Bushfire_Survival_Plan/PAS-BushfireSurvival.pdf or www.fire.qld.gov.au

Queensland Herbarium (2014) *Regional Ecosystem Fire Management Guidelines, Sept 2014*. DSITIA. See www.qld.gov.au/environment/plantsanimals/plants/ecosystems/fire-management/

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (2012) *Planned Burn Guidelines: Southeast Queensland Bioregion*. DNPRSR. www.nprsr.qld.gov.au

South East Queensland Fire and Biodiversity Consortium:

- *Individual Property Fire Management Planning Manual*.
- *Living with Fire Factsheet 2 - Fire Management for Protected Vegetation*.
- *Operational Fire Manual*. See www.fireandbiodiversity.org.au

Land for Wildlife is a voluntary program that encourages and assists landholders to provide habitat for wildlife on their properties. For more information about Land for Wildlife South East Queensland, or to download *Land for Wildlife Notes* free of charge, visit www.lfwseq.org.au

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Information in *Land for Wildlife Notes* is not necessarily endorsed by any of the supporting agencies, nor should it be taken to constitute professional advice or a recommendation of land management.

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This track mounted remote-controlled flail mower can be used to create temporary fire management (control) lines. It can work on very steep slopes and being only 1.2 metres wide it can weave in between most trees. It provides a softer alternative to conventional machinery that scrapes the ground, leaving bare earth. These flail mowers are therefore especially useful to create control lines on steep slopes and erosion prone soils.



Fire rakes, such as this McLeod Tool, can be used to rake away leaf litter from the base of habitat trees.



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