

QPWS fire management - Frequently asked questions

The Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing's (NPSR) Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) manage around 13 million hectares of public land, including national parks, conservation parks, forest reserves, and State forests. Fire is a critical element of its management program for these areas.

Background



Australian ecosystems have been evolving with fire for thousands of years. Many flora and fauna species and communities are dependent on the presence of fire, while some require fire exclusion. The optimal timing, frequency and intensity of fire varies across different ecosystems.

Many natural areas cannot continue to retain their biological diversity without active fire management.

Manipulation of fire regimes to meet ecological requirements and sustainable production objectives is a major challenge for managers of all State lands.

Planned burning is an important tool used by Australian fire authorities and land managers to reduce the impact of wildfires on human safety, land use and environmental values. Priority will always be given to protection of life and property.

QPWS actively responds to wildfire on its parks and forest estates. QPWS wildfire statistics reveal that around half the fires it responds to actually start off these reserves and of those that start on QPWS land, most are contained and do not escape. These statistics dispel the common belief in the community that most fires start on parks and forests and escape to adjoining freehold lands.

The key legislation that governs fire management on QPWS estate includes the: *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*; *Nature Conservation Act 1992*; *Forestry Act 1959*.

Why does QPWS use fire?



QPWS uses the planned application of fire to:

- reduce fuel loads in order to decrease risk to life, property and assets.
- maintain biodiversity, by burning areas of varying size at appropriate intervals to ensure habitat for the widest possible range of species.
- assist in managing some forests for sustainable production (e.g. natural resources such as native forest timber and other forest products).
- help restore and regenerate disturbed ecosystems.
- aid pest eradication and control in national parks and forests.

What is a planned burn?



A planned burn is a fire that is deliberately and legally lit.

It is conducted within predetermined parameters primarily to manage the natural and/or cultural resources of the area (e.g. reducing wildfire hazard, maintenance of ecological processes).

Does QPWS require permits to light fires?

No. QPWS is exempt under Section 66(1) of the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990*, from the requirement to obtain a 'Permit to light a fire' on lands administered under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* or the *Forestry Act 1959*.

However, QPWS does comply with normal permit to burn requirements when conducting planned burns and must comply with other rigorous internal management planning, burn proposal and approval requirements.

The permit exemption does not apply to QPWS managed areas administered under legislation other than the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* or the *Forestry Act 1959*. Where required, the responsibility for the issue of such permits is under the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990* and lies with the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES).

Occupiers of QPWS managed areas such as lessees or permittees are required to obtain a permit to light fires. Notification and consultation processes apply.

Where QPWS is undertaking a cooperative planned burn with adjoining landholders, the landholder must obtain the permit for the non-QPWS component of the burn.

Who does QPWS notify when conducting planned burns?



As a matter of policy and in the interest of open communication and cooperation, the relevant fire warden, QFES fire communication call centres, adjacent neighbours, and lessees must be notified of QPWS' intent to burn within a reasonable timeframe.

Park and forest visitors and other users are notified where practical, generally through signage or media advice.

Users are advised to observe road and track closures, and contact their local park office for any enquiries regarding a specific proposed burn.

What process does QPWS use to approve planned burns?

A comprehensive fire management system guides QPWS in planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and reporting its fire management activities.

Each year, annual planned burning programs are prepared by field rangers and support staff, and reviewed for approval by the fire referral group, consisting of experts and other interested parties.

Fire strategies form the basis for fire management including burn regimes for an area, which are also approved by the fire referral group.

Approval from the local senior ranger is required prior to igniting a planned burn, to ensure that conditions and preparations are within the planned burn guidelines.

Where applicable, QPWS collaborates with other agencies and local fire management groups to coordinate planned burn programs and address broader community wildfire mitigation issues.

What does QPWS consider when implementing planned burns?

QPWS considers a range of factors including weather conditions (temperature, relative humidity, wind strength and direction), soil moisture and fuel curing that suit the aims of the burn and minimise impacts, such as smoke, on surrounding urban and rural communities.

A final decision is made immediately prior to each burn to ensure conditions are favourable.

Planned burns can be undertaken at any time of the year when conditions are suitable.



When is the fire season?

Wildfires can occur at any time of the year, but in Queensland severe fire weather is more likely to occur from late winter to early summer. This is when fuel and soil conditions are dry and there is a greater likelihood of dry and gusty westerly or south-westerly winds.

Queensland's fire season is generally July to December in the north of the state and the east coast, and extends longer in inland areas, sometimes through to March in the far south west.

The timing and duration of the fire season is seasonally dependent with variations likely from year to year.

What does QPWS do prior to the fire season?

QPWS undertakes annual pre-emptive wildfire mitigation programs. These include:

- reviewing annual fire programs.
- maintaining and upgrading firelines.
- regional preparedness checks.
- updating fire response procedures and key contacts.
- evaluating wildfire risk and identifying priority protection areas.

- ensuring inter-agency cooperation and plant hire arrangements are in place.
- reviewing the adequacy of staff training levels, equipment stores, communication systems, detection systems and plant and equipment maintenance.
- fine tuning cooperative arrangements—inter-agency exercises.
- implementing planned burns.

What does QPWS do during the fire season?

QPWS closely monitors wildfire risk and fire danger conditions across the land it manages and maintains preparedness levels relevant to the risk.

In managing fire on its lands, QPWS places the highest priority on protecting human life, followed by protecting infrastructure and environmental values.

Does QPWS work with other agencies?

QPWS has a strong focus on inter-agency and community liaison. QPWS works closely with other agencies that have responsibilities for managing fire, as well as with rural fire brigades, adjoining landholders, local communities and Traditional Owners. Protocols guide Traditional Owner consultation and involvement.

QPWS has developed agreements with QFES for rural fire management, and other State land management agencies with responsibilities for fire management on State lands.

QPWS is represented at the state and national level on various fire management committees and working groups. It also has a [Good Neighbour Policy](#) in relation to cross boundary management issues with neighbours and local communities.

How many QPWS staff are trained in fire operations?



QPWS has approximately 600 staff trained and available to carry out planned burns and respond to wildfires.

It is a requirement that employees cannot attend a fire unless they:

- are trained to the basic fire-fighter level of competency.
- are appropriately equipped with both fire operations equipment and personal protective equipment.
- possess a reasonable level of health and fitness at the time.

Advanced training is provided for staff with a role in managing responses to wildfires. Other specialised training, such as fire management planning, conducting aerial ignition, and incident control is also undertaken by more experienced staff.

Useful links

Rural Fire Service <www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au>

South East Queensland Fire and Biodiversity Consortium <www.fireandbiodiversity.org.au>

Geoscience Australia <www.sentinel.ga.gov.au>

North Australian Fire Information <<http://www.firenorth.org.au>>

Publications

QPWS Fire Management Mission Statement

Fire Management Brochure

Good Neighbour Policy

These documents are available on the NPSR website <www.npsr.qld.gov.au>.

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