

Factsheet – Fire Mitigation Vegetation Management

(On Land Under Care and Control of Council)

Council delivers a range of strategic vegetation management programs that prioritise road safety and fire mitigation outcomes on land under the care and control of Council; described as follows:

Road & Reserves Annual Maintenance Program (RRAMP)

The aim of the RRAMP is to maintain road safety and reduce vegetation fuel loads adjacent road corridors to mitigate the impacts of a fire. Reducing fuel loads adjacent to road corridors does not, however, prevent a fire from igniting or prevent a fire from moving through the landscape.

Not all roads in the Adelaide Hills Council district are managed for fire mitigation purposes. Unless a fuel load presents a risk to adjacent assets or may contribute to significant fire behaviour in the landscape, Council resources are used to target areas containing fuel loads that are assessed as exceeding risk thresholds as a more effective way of keeping communities safe.

RRAMP Treatment Schedule:

- Vegetation located on road reserves and road related areas in the Adelaide Hills Council district are scheduled for fuel reduction and sightline maintenance works twice a year during the Spring to Summer period.
- The first round of roadside and reserves slashing commences in October prior to the onset of the fire danger season and the second round of slashing is programmed to commence in January.
- The timing of the second round of slashing is programmed according to prevailing weather conditions and the rate of grass curing (drying) in the district.
- If the second round of slashing is undertaken before the grass has cured off, the grass could regrow and require another round of slashing.
- Council staff and slashing contractors work closely together to monitor prevailing environmental conditions and determine the most appropriate time to commence the second round of slashing.
- Delays to completing scheduled slashing works may sometimes be caused by inclement weather or Total Fire Ban days when machinery that has the potential to produce sparks is not allowed to be used.

RRAMP Treatment Locality Criteria:

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Roads that are included on the RRAMP have been identified and prioritised for treatment using the following criteria:

- (a) Level of vehicle traffic volume
- (b) Roadways that provide essential access and egress to residential properties at risk of entrapment during a bushfire, generally roadways with east west alignments
- (c) The connectivity of road systems that provide strategic fuel control breaks in the landscape.

Council will reduce fuel loads on these road verges to the private property boundary where:

- (a) Slashing machinery access is possible, or to 1.5 m off the edge of the road where machinery access is restricted.
- (b) Verge area is free of obstacles or hazards; due to steep/uneven terrain or the presence of dense vegetation it may not be possible to perform any maintenance.

Asset Protection Zone Program (APZ)

Works associated with Council's Asset Protection Zone Program impact upon Council's managed verges, reserves or unmade public roads. An Asset Protection Zone is a specified area surrounding a built asset or structure where vegetation fuel loads are reduced to inhibit the travel of a fire and reduce the effects of heat, flame and ember attack on an identified asset.

Council has established and manages Asset Protection Zones annually in areas supporting native vegetation and dedicated natural area reserves to mitigate the impacts of a fire occurring adjacent assets, infrastructure and private properties. As the majority of catastrophic fires occurring in the district will approach from the north and west, areas of vegetation that are present on the northern and western boundaries of properties that exceed acceptable thresholds are targeted for vegetation fuel reduction.

APZ Vegetation Treatment Criteria:

- Vegetation fuel loads are assessed and measured on a tons per hectare basis.
- Areas of vegetation which exceed acceptable thresholds and present a hazard to adjacent infrastructure or assets may be cleared to reduce the risk of a fire impacting the area by the establishment and maintenance of Asset Protection Zones.
- Council manages CFS Bushfire Management Area Plan (BMAP) Asset Protection Zones adjacent critical infrastructure and facilities identified as at risk in the BMAP on an annual basis. These assets are owned and operated by both Council and external agencies, such as SA Water, SA Power Networks and telecommunication companies.

Vegetation fuel loads are assessed and measured on a tons per hectare basis. Areas of vegetation which exceed acceptable limits and present a hazard to adjacent assets or property may be reduced to lower the risk of a fire impacting the area by the establishment and maintenance of Asset Protection Zones.

As most catastrophic fires occurring in the district will approach from the north and west, areas of vegetation that are present on the northern and western boundaries of properties that exceed acceptable thresholds are targeted for vegetation fuel reduction.

Council also manages CFS Bushfire Management Area Plan (BMAP) Asset Protection Zones adjacent critical infrastructure and facilities identified as at risk in the BMAP on an annual basis. These assets are owned and operated by both Council and external agencies, such as SA Water, SA Power Networks and telecommunication companies.

Fire Track Maintenance Program

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Council manages and maintains a strategic network of fire tracks on both public and private land to support the CFS and State Government fire management agencies to implement bushfire mitigation strategies or for fire suppression operations. Fire tracks are maintained to conform to standards defined in the *South Australian Firebreaks, Fire Access Tracks and Sign Standards Guidelines* (Government Agencies Fire Management Working Group GAFMWG 2015).

Fire tracks are monitored by both Council staff and CFS brigades annually to identify tracks requiring vegetation clearance, maintenance works or upgrades. Fire tracks that are identified as non-conforming to standards are scheduled for maintenance works in consultation with the CFS and external contractors.

Priority fire tracks identified by the CFS as strategic containment lines or critical to fire suppression operations are scheduled for routine maintenance annually.

Roadside Weed Control Program

Council recognises the importance of delivering a strategic and proactive approach to bushfire management while also balancing the needs of protecting biodiversity values.

The Roadside Weed Control Program aims to ensure the strategic planning and delivery of roadside weed control across the district and focuses on reducing weed threats in remnant native vegetation occurring in road reserves. This Program is particularly focused on the Native Vegetation Marker System (also known as Blue Marker Sites) by assessing declared and emerging weed threats on priority roadsides and undertaking coordinated control actions to address weed infestations impacting biodiversity values or that increase fuel loads beyond acceptable thresholds.

The Roadside Weed Control Program enables the Landscapes Board to work in collaboration with Adelaide Hills Council and other stakeholders to develop strategic works programs to control declared and environmental weeds occurring in road reserves:

- within high-risk zones identified in the CFS Bushfire Management Area Plan,
- within densely populated areas of the district,
- within high biodiversity value reserves, and more specifically within the distribution ranges of the Nationally and State threatened flora and fauna populations.

Regional Landscape Boards have statutory responsibility under Section 192 (8) of the *Landscapes South Australia Act 2019* for the management of declared plants within road reserves. Council continues to support private property owners to manage declared plants on road reserves when funding is available but is not legally responsible for their management.

Native Vegetation Limitations

The clearance or any modification of native vegetation in South Australia is tightly controlled. Provisions are made however under the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 and the Native Vegetation Act 1991 to allow for the clearance of native vegetation on roadsides and adjacent to private properties or assets to address fire mitigation issues.

Under the *Native Vegetation Act 1991*, native vegetation may be approved for clearance to establish or maintain Asset Protection Zones by the relevant management agency:

- Within 5 meters of a fence line (or 1m on a road reserve with Council approval)
- Within 10 meters of an existing building (i.e. shed);
- Within 20 meters of a dwelling (i.e. house) (excluding large trees that have a trunk circumference of 2 metres or more (measured at a point 1 metre above the base of the tree);

Vegetation Burning on Private Lands Program (including Council reserves)

Council supports the Department of Environment and Water to deliver the Burning on Private Lands Program; designed to reduce vegetation fuel loads at a landscape level to help reduce bushfire risks on public and private lands.

Council is also represented on the Adelaide Mount Lofty Ranges Bushfire Management Committees and works with the CFS and the community to identify areas at greatest risk of bushfire across the state through the Bushfire Management Area Planning process.

Prescribed burning is regarded as a vital strategy to improve the protection of built and natural assets from the adverse impacts of bushfire by reducing heavy fuel loads in strategic areas. Fuel reduction burning increases the chances of early fire suppression and provides a safer environment during bushfires. Although the prescribed burns are proposed primarily for reducing fuel loads, it is recognised that on many Adelaide Hills Council properties there may be opportunities to deliver secondary benefits including weed management or other ecological benefits, such as bushland regeneration, improvement of wildlife habitat and overall bush restoration outcomes. This has been viewed as beneficial for a number of sites where Council has been restoring bushland for many years in partnership with a number of organisations, including Bush for Life (Trees for Life), Landcare and other conservation focused volunteer groups.

Ecological Controls

Upon request by Adelaide Hills Council, DEW implements smaller, mosaic burns with longer burn intervals. This allows certain portions of a particular reserves to be in varying stages of recovery at any one point in time. This approach is aimed at maximising available habitat to flora and fauna reliant on the native vegetation. We know that there are optimal burn intervals for various species in the Mount Lofty Ranges. For example, Southern Brown Bandicoots benefit from a landscape 5-8 years postburn, as do some woodland birds such as the Chestnut-rumped Heathwren (both threatened under the EPBC Act), while some woodland birds significantly benefit from a 20 – 40-year burn interval. There is work to do in this space to better understand the impacts of burning regimes on woodland bird species, as identified in the Rebird the Ranges Action Plan (2025–2100).

Council has contributed seed funding to the University of Adelaide to undertake research into the drivers of woodland bird decline, but more work needs to be done in this space to help shape the best all round approach that supports native fauna, rather than undermine it. In the interim, we have opted for a precautionary principle (mosaic burns with long intervals) so that we can simultaneously address human safety and long-term sustainability of our local wildlife.

To reduce impacts to fauna, DEW brush cut around habitat assets such as hollow bearing trees and under-represented species in the reserve where requested. These actions are undertaken to ensure they survive the burn. Another ecological benefit is the extra resourcing to undertake intensive weed control in the first 5-8 years post burn. DEW provides 3 years of on-ground field support for weed control actions to manage the first flush of fire responsive weeds. Council contributes additional resourcing for 5 years post the burn; this resourcing is then reduced by 50% for the year 6 – 8 following the burn. This post burn resourcing is in addition to usual operational budgets. Council has previous managed to improve the ecological condition of previously burnt areas associated with this program to a level higher prior to the burn.