

FIRE IN THE LANDSCAPE IN THE SOUTH BURNETT REGION

An introduction to the 'permit to light fire' system and the use of fire as a land management tool.

The Use of Fire

While 'burning-off' is an inherent part of most land management systems, and the majority of our unique Australian ecosystems are adapted to fire ecology, the use of fire as a tool is becoming more strictly monitored as rural areas adjust to changing land use, population densities and demographics.

In the South Burnett land management is no longer dominated entirely by primary producers. There is an increasing number of 'life stylers' leaving suburbia in favour of a rural retreat, employees seeking opportunities in regional industry, and yet other individuals who purchase properties for conservation purposes, which include protecting remnant vegetation, wildlife, timber and other natural resources for future generations.

Over time our remnant bushland has been greatly reduced and its protection and planned management is becoming more important for the safety of rural residents, the maintenance of biodiversity and water quality, and protection of our landscapes.

Fire Ecology

While fire is an integral part of these landscapes there are many species and ecosystems that are not adapted to fire, for example our local dry rainforests or 'scrubs' - these areas should never be burnt. However, for the fire adapted ecosystems, and as a sustainable land use tool, burning is recommended at irregular intervals and never at a whole-of-property scale at any one time.

In addition to never burning rainforests and as a general rule of thumb this means varying your fire frequencies and patterns on your property to produce a mosaic effect. This maintains productivity, biodiversity and can help break up, or slow down wild fires.

The following burning intervals are recommended to maintain a level of safety on your property, but remember to vary the intervals between each burn:

- Wet sclerophyll (tall eucalypt) forest: every 20-100 years
- Dry sclerophyll (open eucalypt) forest and woodland: every 3-6 years with a grassy understorey, or 7-25 years with a shrubby understorey
- Heathlands (including heathy areas in open forest): every 7-20 years, but varied mostly at the 8-12 year interval
- Add to health after the 8-12 year interval health-type vegetation occurs around the South Burnett as an understorey component of open forest or as montane health (stunted vegetation) or rock outcrops or mountains
- Grassland or open grassy areas: 3-6 year intervals dependent upon prevailing climatic conditions
- Rainforest complexes (scrubs, vine forest, fern forests): never
- Wetlands (never), or riparian or fringing gallery vegetation: 15-30 year intervals



Special Points of Interest:

- Permits are required before undertaking prescribed burns
- You are required to contact your local Fire Warden to make an application to burn
- Your application will be assessed and if suitable you will be provided with a permit to burn
- It is a legal requirement that you contact ALL your neighbours to inform them of your intent to apply for a permit to light fire, and give them the opportunity to object (the timing may not suit them)
- You must ring Firecom prior to lighting a fire and to provide them with your permit number - and call them again if you need to relight on another day during your permit period. It is required that you also advise your local Rural Fire Brigade that you are lighting a fire (the phone numbers are provided on your permit). For further information please visit www.fire.qld.gov.au/communitysafety/bushfire/permits.asp
- Landholder's must contact South Burnett Regional Council for permission to burn the roadside reserve

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Burning Off

Fuel loads need to be assessed and infrastructure protected, prior to burning. If you have no experience of fire, do not light one, even if you do have some experience, think twice and follow the legal procedures. Contact your local Fire Warden or your local Council for contact details, and prepare and plan well in advance. Pay heed to the conditions of your permit and the advice provided by your Fire Warden in order to minimise unwanted risk and nuisance to others. For the cost of a donation, Rural Fire Brigades can assist with 'prescribed' burns, and they have the equipment and training to control fire on your property.

Never light the entire perimeter or circumference of the area you wish to burn at any one time as this makes it virtually impossible to control the fire, denies wildlife unburnt escape routes, and allows areas to burn that cannot be kept under strict visual surveillance and control.

Never light fires from the bottom of a slope; unless otherwise guided by fire professionals, always light your prescribed burns from the top of the slope. Fire creates its own wind and can spread at incredible speeds uphill, gathering momentum and intensity the further it travels upslope.

Fuels with a diameter less than 6 mm (fine fuels), comprise the bulk of most fuel loads and burn very hot and fast. These are the fuels that create the initial conflagration and fire intensity. Further, due to their small size they can be carried as embers by the wind and can start spot fires well away from the fire ground.

Landholders who are interested in viewing the Rural Operations (Rural Fire Service) bushfire risk mapping for the South Burnett region can do so at www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au/Bushfire_Safety/Building_in_Bushfire_Prone_Areas/Risk_South%20Burnett.pdf

Alternatively, if you do not have access to a computer or the internet at home, call the Queensland Rural Fire Service regional officer at Caloundra on (07) 5420 7517, where officers can attend to your enquiries.

To view bushfire risk analysis mapping for other regions in Queensland please go to www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au/Bushfire_Safety/Building_in_Bushfire_Prone_Areas/Shire_Risk_Maps_Page.html

Reference: Southeast Queensland Fire and Biodiversity Consortium, 2002, *Fire Management Operational Manual*, Southeast Queensland Fire and Biodiversity Consortium, Brisbane

For Further Information

Please contact our friendly Natural Resource Management
Officers: (07) 4189 9100

www.southburnett.qld.gov.au



Mini breaks provide excellent control lines to 'blacken' the boundaries of the area you wish to burn (to help contain the fire) prior to conducting the property burn



Natural, unburnt mosaics are needed in the landscape to assist natural regeneration and recolonisation by native plant species.

Information Series