

Russell Park Fire Management Plan: Principles and Values

VISION

To care for our country - Traditional Custodians working in partnerships to manage, maintain and protect the unique cultural, spiritual and natural values of Booburrigan Ngmmunge.

To work together to ensure we achieve protection, recognition, understanding and respect for our culture by all people.

To invigorate relationships with stakeholders to give our people hope, encouragement and security, now and into the future.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY AND PARTNERS

This management plan pays respects to all the Elders, past and present, who have ensured that Aboriginal peoples' connections to the Bunya Mountains landscape, of which Russell Park is an important part, have remained. These connections are as significant as ever. The Wakka Wakka, Jarowair, Barrunggam, and Djaku-nde peoples are all acknowledged for their Traditional Custodianship of the Bunya landscape. Without these people caring for country throughout the ages, the special values of Russell Park would not exist today. Acknowledgement is made to all Aboriginal people who are connected to the Bunyas today, physically, culturally and spiritually, as the future care for this country is in their hands.

To all those that have contributed to the understanding of the Bunya Mountains through their research and connections to the land, your work is acknowledged and has been critical in developing this plan.

The Bunya Peoples' Aboriginal Corporation and the Bunya Mountains Murri Rangers are acknowledged for their key roles in driving caring for country activities in the Bunya Mountains, particularly in Russell Park. The lessons learnt through this process have been invaluable for developing this plan, and are key to the future management of Russell Park. The Burnett Mary Regional Group (BMRG) has played a pivotal role in facilitating and enabling the re-connection of Aboriginal people in the active management of Russell Park. The BMRG's investment of financial and human resources into the management of Russell Park has been essential. Western Downs Regional Council are acknowledged as the holder to the title of Russell Park, and their efforts and energy to create key partnerships with BPAC the Murri Rangers and BMRG in the management of the land are also acknowledged. The Bunya Mountains Murri Rangers have connected with the Firesticks program, networking Aboriginal fire managers across Australia. This is an important relationship to progress caring for country activities using fire that are driven by Aboriginal groups in a culturally relevant way.

FIRESTICKS, CULTURAL FIRE AND CULTURAL PROTOCOLS

FIRESTICKS

Firesticks is an Indigenous led network that aims to re-invigorate the use of cultural burning by facilitating cultural learning pathways to fire and land management. It is an Indigenous initiative to support people to look after country, share their experiences and collectively explore ways to achieve their goals. Firesticks is an opportunity for people to build on the knowledge they already have on country and look for ways to make use of new technologies and understandings as a way to support cultural identity and practice. Firesticks is building a community of practice, sharing fire stories and communicating positively about the work that is undertaken and its value to people and place. Mentoring and networking through Firesticks strengthens community and country. Implementing fire to enhance ecosystem health within culturally connected landscapes improves habitat condition and connectivity. Firesticks ultimately strives to empower communities to work together towards healthy, functional and resilient landscapes.

CULTURAL FIRE

Fire is known by many terms and in many languages. Cultural fire describes practices used by Aboriginal people to enhance the health of land and its people. Cultural fire means different things to different people. It is ceremony to welcome people to country or is as simple as a campfire around which people gather to share, learn, and celebrate. It can include burning (or preventing burning) for the health of particular cultural values, people, plants, animals and places.

READING COUNTRY

Country tells us when to burn. There are indicators that inform us that cultural protocols are being followed when burning country. For example, it is lore that the canopy of gum country is always protected. The canopy should have no signs of damage or scorch marks and low fire scars on tree base. By reading country, we are looking for an increase in cover and diversity of grasses and micro plants, and Gum tree reproduction in forest areas (new generations). We are also looking for an increase in key native fauna presence. We need to be on country regularly and always reading country to know what actions are required, and if these actions are working. Being able to see and move through gum country and grasslands, following cultural pathways maintained through the ages by fire, is another indicator of the health of the country. Blanket management does not work or align with the Aboriginal cultural practice of caring for country. Country determines the management approach.



CULTURAL ASSETS

COUNTRY

The whole of the Bunya Mountains landscape can be considered as a significant cultural place. Aboriginal people used intensive and strategic fire management practices in the Bunya Mountains and surrounds to facilitate access to and from the Bunya gatherings, and to create ideal habitat mosaics for hunting. Since the decline of the Aboriginal gatherings in the Bunya Mountains in the 1870's, the absence of this intensive and strategic fire management has led to a significant decline in the extent and health of the grassland balds, and the open Eucalypt with grassy understoreys. For this reason, fire management in the Bunya Mountains has high significance for both cultural and ecological reasons.

The grasslands have been continually declining in area due to invasion by woody species and are considered to be an endangered regional ecosystem. A quarter of the 1951 grassland area had been colonised by woody species by 1991 (Fensham and Fairfax 1996). For example the Mount Mowbulla bald has visibly changed since the 1950s with invasion primarily by rainforest species and acacias. These plant community successional changes are an ongoing process that will likely continue if left unmanaged.

Aboriginal fire management to maintain grasslands and grassy open forest habitats was multi-purpose. It enabled access across country, provided refuge for species of cultural importance, and also supported prime habitat for grazing animals that were important foods in Aboriginal peoples' diets. Hunting using this method of manipulating habitats was efficient and sustainable. Wallabies and bandicoots were key game animals.

SIGNIFICANT SPECIES

Other significant Aboriginal cultural resources found in Russell Park include:

- Echidna, Aboriginal language names: gayu(y)ara, giirunraa, gira.nya, djumbe.yn, gawa(r), gar, buniyn, djena-djena, djina-djina (gayu(y)ara)
- Freshwater Crayfish (Blue Claw) Nhinyuwen, yil, yiil (giil?), newin-newin
- Honey from native bees
- Certain animals were also important totems, or Yurrie. Yurrie played a key role in Aboriginal lore, kinship and the connection with country. Some examples of Yurrie for Aboriginal groups associated with the Bunya Mountains include:
- Night Owl (boobook)
- Bush or Scrub Turkey (wuyan, wawun (wowan), wayun, waaruun, wayuwin (wayuwen), waan, wawun, wohwan, guguwin)
- Willie Wagtail (ginder ginder, gindir gindir) Messenger bird
- White Cockatoo (gera, geyarr, giyaa, gayr, gayira, gara) related to important lore and stories
- Carpenter Snake (Wakka Wakka, Kabul, Guju, Cobble Cobble)

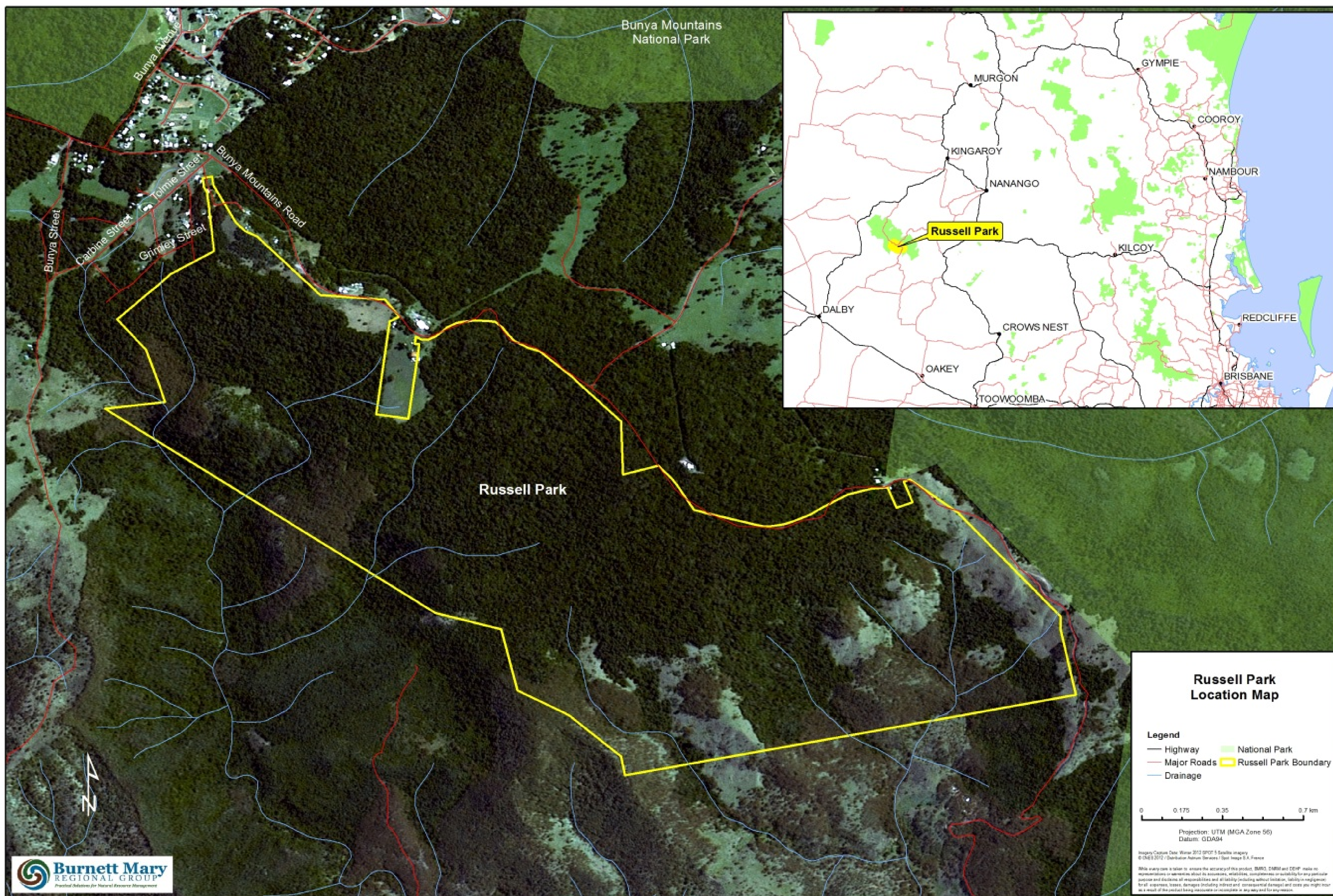
Russell Park also hosts some key fauna species of ecological significance that rely upon the maintenance of the habitat mosaic. The Black-breasted button-quail (*Turnix melanogaster*) is a territorial, sedentary species that has observed populations within Russell Park. This species is listed as vulnerable due to habitat loss, introduced predators and inappropriate fire regimes. Large forest owls, particularly the Powerful and Sooty Owls, depend on hollow trees found within the rainforest and eucalypt forest. Ensuring a fire regime that maintains a buffer around habitats with the hollow trees is vital.

The Bunya Sunskink, *Lampropholis colossus* is endemic to the Bunya Mountains, and specific to the grassland balds, and is possibly an indicator species for the health of the grassland balds. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service are undertaking research into this species as an indicator for the balds.

The Collared delma, *Delma torquata* is listed as vulnerable, and is dependent on the grassland understorey in the open eucalypt forests. This highlights the importance of using fire to protect the grassy understorey from acacia, invasive exotic plants and rainforest understorey vegetation encroachment.



Black-breasted button-quail *Turnix melanogaster*

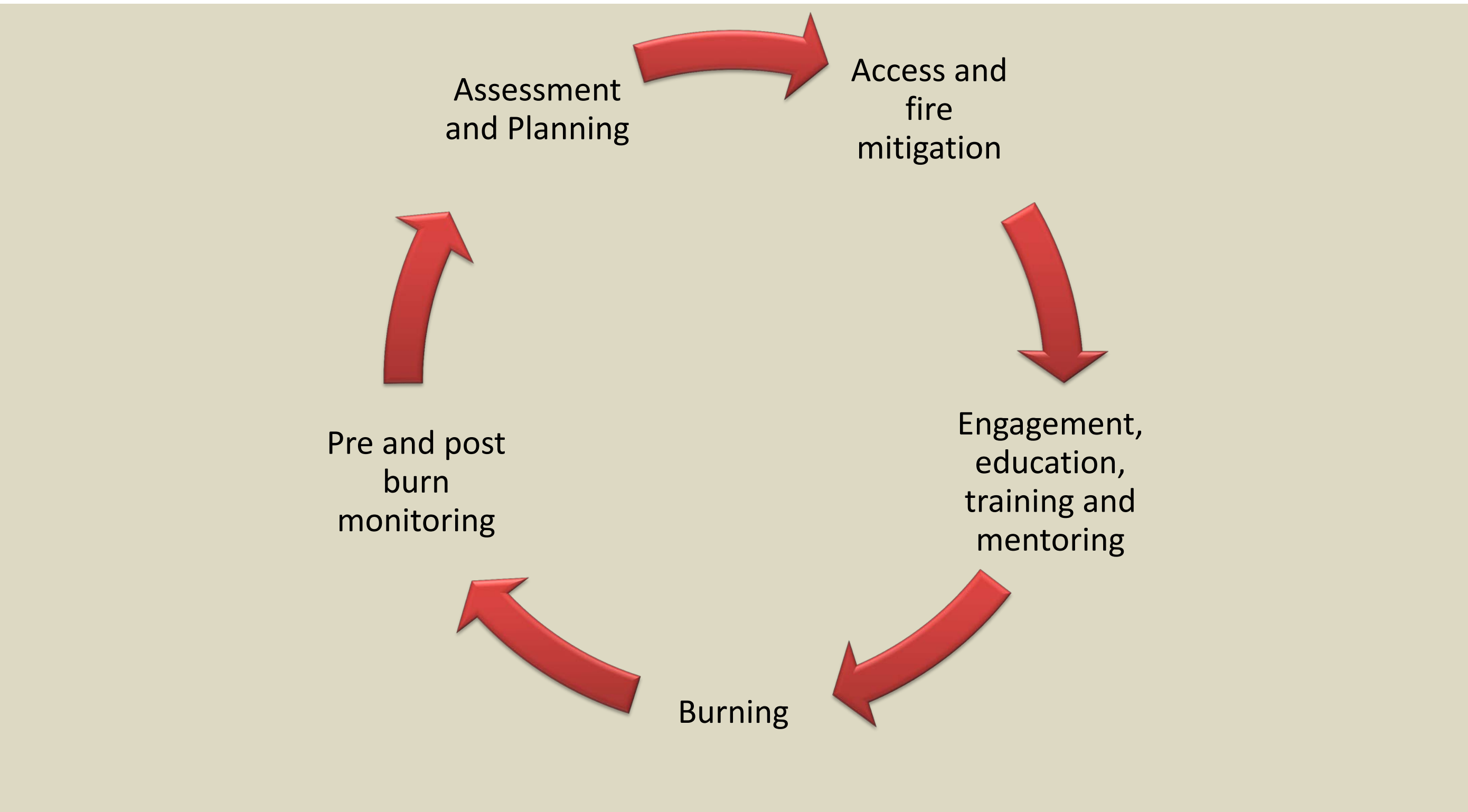


Russell Park Fire Management Plan: Actions and Implementation

These priority actions focus on culturally integrated fire and invasive species management within Land Management Areas (LMA) to maintain cultural landscape features that retain or improve habitat condition and maintain ecological and cultural values, while reducing bush fire risk.

A summary of key considerations for implementation of priority actions are as follows:

ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING	ACCESS AND FIRE MITIGATION (MAINTAIN ROADS, TRAILS AND CONTROL LINES)	ENGAGEMENT, EDUCATION, TRAINING AND MENTORING	UNDERTAKE BURNING AND PRE/POST MONITORING AND FIRE RESTORATION ACTIVITIES	Grassland bald indicators:
Maintain an adaptive management approach in the protection and enhancement of cultural and ecological assets. Identify, map and record key values and threats to determine and prioritise associated fire management actions with particular reference to: life and property; risk management; cultural lore, heritage, practice and responsibility; threatened species; and endangered ecological communities. Apply observational and Indigenous knowledge recording methods to determine impacts of fire on ecological and cultural values.	Asset Protection Zone (APZ) – maintain low fuel loads around built assets - Regularly slash/clear in particular before and during the Bush Fire Danger Period. As required monitor and maintain roads, trails, gates, fencing and control lines for key assets (cultural, ecological and infrastructure) to manage access, reduce risk, prevent illegal dumping of rubbish and avoid dispersal of invasive species.	Community and stakeholder engagement; Firesticks training and mentoring series; ongoing ecological-cultural monitoring; accredited training; cross-cultural training; developing culturally appropriate plans of management; ecological-cultural assessments; school and community programs; research programs and workshops.	Implement culturally integrated fire and invasive species management actions including site preparation, burning, restoration, monitoring and evaluation to protect and enhance cultural and ecological assets, while reducing risk to life and property.	Access to county and maintenance of cultural landscape values. Increase cover and diversity of grasses and micro plants, native fauna presence. Bunya blue Grass, Kangaroo grass and Bunya Sun Skink potential indicators of healthy grassland. Decrease invasive exotic weeds and wattle.
		Bunya Murri Rangers to conduct all neighbour and stakeholder engagement.	Set up monitoring photo points for indicators and undertake active Fauna searches - Visual signs of more animal presence –sightings, scats, markings. Record data. Ensure monitoring points capture micro habitat representation eg wetter areas, range of aspect, rocky outcrop areas.	Eucalypt Gum forest indicators: Access to county and maintenance of cultural landscape values. Protect the canopy, should have no signs of damage/scorch of canopy. Low fire scars on tree base. Increase cover and diversity of grasses and micro plants, Eucalypt Gum tree reproduction in forest areas (new generations), increase in native fauna presence. Decrease invasive exotic weeds and wattle.



Management area	Veg community and key values	Issues and threats	Action
1: Fisher's Lookout bald Areas	Grassland bald. Lookout infrastructure (track, bench seats and signs). Wetland micro habitat.	Needs fire. Kikuya, African Love Grass and woody weeds. High visitor traffic area. Infrastructure – power lines and road. Wet area particularly weedy between lookout and rainforest	Priority 2. Conduct on ground assessment and planning. Burn for good grass return in July-August, when good soil moisture and heavy dew. Burn plan. Pre and post fire- treat weeds ie African Love Grass and Kikuya. Set up monitoring photo points for indicators. Monitoring of the wet area/s on the bald. 2 day burn Frequency: yearly until country tells otherwise (based on monitoring.)
2: Mount Mowbullian	Grassland bald. Aboriginal and colonial heritage sites.	Needs fire. Woody weeds; balloon cotton. Protection of heritage sites. Pig damage.	Priority 1. Burn June – July (best June). Burn plan. Post fire-treat weeds. Set up monitoring photo points for indicators. 2-4 day burn. Frequency: yearly until country tells otherwise (based on monitoring.)
3: Munroe's Corner bald	Grassland bald. Aboriginal and colonial heritage sites.	Needs fire. Woody weeds.	Priority 2. Burn for good grass return in July-August, when good soil moisture and heavy dew. Burn plan. Post fire- treat weeds. Set up monitoring photo points for indicators. 4 days.
4: Little Mowbullian	Grassland bald/ Eucalypt Woodland. Lookout and track.	Needs fire. Whole range of weed issues. Walking track needs re-routing.	Priority 1. Burn June – July (best June). Burn plan. Post fire- treat weeds. Set up monitoring photo points for indicators. 2-4 Day burn.
5: Carbine Chute	Grassland bald/ Eucalypt forest. Colonial heritage – Carbine chute – track and interpretive signs.	Needs fire. Rainforest species encroachment. Cattle grazing impacting grassland.	Priority 1. Map and plan into 4-6 burn sections LMA5(a-f). Burn April-June (best May). Engage Neighbour (Royce) re Burning on his land and permit. Discuss track and fencing. Set up monitoring photo points for indicators.
6: Chute 3	Grassland bald/ Eucalypt forest. Colonial heritage site.	Needs fire. Range of weed issues. Needs coordinated approach with neighbours.	Priority 1. Map and plan burn. Burn April-July (best May). Engage Neighbours re Burning on their land and permit. Set up monitoring photo points for indicators. Post fire: Manually treat weedy areas – (hand pulling and brush cutting).
7: Southern Eucalypt forests and balds	Grassland bald/ Eucalypt forest.	Needs fire. Range of weed issue.s Access difficulties. Needs coordinated approach with neighbours.	Assessment and planning.
8: Park- wide management	Grassland bald/Eucalypt forest and Bunya forest. Aboriginal and colonial heritage sites.	Walking tracks and visitor infrastructure. Pest animals and disease.	No fire in the Bunya forest, vine thicket, springs/waterways.

