



Parks and Wildlife Closure Protocols for National Park and Recreation Site due to Fire Danger Rating

I wish to inform you of Parks and Wildlife's protocols in relation to bushfire risk and park closures and provide you with information that may assist in planning your own response to bushfire risk.



Following the catastrophic Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, and more recent fires in Western Australia such as Parkerville in 2014, community expectations for response and management of fire risk have changed (see Attachment 1 for further information).

Western Australia has adopted the new nationally agreed Fire Danger Rating scale to help communities understand information about bushfire risk (see Attachment 2.). More information on the Fire Danger Ratings is available on the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) website www.dfes.wa.gov.au.

Every day during the fire season the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) forecasts an outlook of the fire danger index by considering elements of the predicted weather including temperature, relative humidity, wind speed, and dryness of vegetation. State fire agencies, in consultation with the Bureau, then consider a range of other factors relating to that area to set the Fire Danger Rating. Factors include the length of time the fire danger index has been elevated, the extent of fire already in the landscape, fuel and dryness and the likelihood of weather events such as lightning.

Fire Danger Ratings are communicated to the wider community through weather forecasts, newspapers, radio, TV and on websites.

PARKS AND WILDLIFE CLOSURE PROTOCOLS

Closures will apply to parks and recreation sites according to the fire danger rating for the designated Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) weather forecast district (see Attachment 3). While a park or reserve will be declared closed, it will not be possible to physically restrict access to areas that are not fenced or gated.

A list of closed parks will usually be provided on the Parks and Wildlife website www.dpaw.wa.gov.au and through the general and social media during the day before the forecast Very High to Catastrophic Fire Danger day. Occasionally the Department may only receive short warning that a Very High to Catastrophic Fire Danger day will be declared and notification may be on the day of closure. As soon as a decision is made to close parks it will be communicated through the above mentioned methods.

Closure duration is based on the daily forecast period which is reviewed at the beginning and end of each day and will be confirmed in information releases.

People planning to visit parks and recreation sites during these periods of Very High to Catastrophic Fire Danger conditions should review their plans and avoid bushfire prone areas. Those already in bushfire prone areas should leave the night before or early in the morning to avoid the risk.

During periods of higher fire risk throughout the bushfire season, Parks and Wildlife will provide information regarding park closures and bushfire risk, while recognising the need for people to take responsibility for their own actions and safety. The Department will endeavour to do this in a way that doesn't discourage enjoyment of Western Australia's parks and waterways.

Parks and Wildlife will take the following action in response to the highest levels of Fire Danger Rating in relation to bushfire risk and public visitation:

Catastrophic Days

On days of Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating, all parks and reserves managed by Parks and Wildlife identified as significant bushfire risk will be closed.

Extreme / Severe / Very High Days & Other Bans

On days of Extreme, Severe and Very High Fire Danger Rating the majority of parks should remain open. However, there are exceptions where parks will be closed including: where an area is identified as high bushfire risk; where existing fire suppression commitments reduce response capacity; and on any day with a Total Fire Ban. Harvest Bans and Vehicle Movement Bans issued by local governments may also require area closures in some circumstances.

ACTIONS FOR TENANTS AND LEASE/LICENCE HOLDERS

All tenants, lease and licence holders need to be aware of the bushfire risk and safety issues that may affect their clientele and themselves.

Parks and Wildlife will be closing parks and recreation sites in high fire risk areas on days of Catastrophic fire danger rating and some parks on days of Extreme, Severe and Very High, as well as during Total Fire Bans (as above) from time to time. Parks and Wildlife will not be closing any commercial business or tenant activity, however closed parks, sites and areas will be unavailable for normal business activities on these days. You are advised to consider your response on days when park closures are in place. Your operation and emergency response procedures should include alternatives that avoid bushfire prone areas or other suitable arrangements during conditions that result in Catastrophic, Extreme, Severe or Very High days, and days of declared Total Fire Ban.

Lease holders / occupiers are legally responsible for the safety and wellbeing of people on your lease. Licensed commercial operators have similar legal responsibilities regarding client safety and compliance with your licence conditions. If you are concerned about your legal liability please seek your own legal advice.

Attached is an information note that provides further background on bushfire risk management. Also attached is the Department of Fire and Emergency Services table outlining the Fire Danger Ratings and what it means to you, and maps indicating the

BoM weather zones in which the warnings will apply. As a lessee, tenant, or licence holder you need to confirm which zone(s) you operate in and take steps to ensure the safety of your clientele.

The department will make every effort to provide you with information about closures through our 'Parks Trails and Road Closure' page in the 'Park Alerts' section of the Parks and Wildlife website as well as the Commercial Operator email alerts. Information will also be posted on Parks and Wildlife's Facebook and Twitter pages. Also we have alert apps for Apple and Android devices which cover both alerts and park and road closures. These can be downloaded from the Apple App store or Google Play store.

Apple <https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/dpaw-alerts/id767156295?mt=8>

Android <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=main.project.dpaw&hl=en>

However, we urge you to keep informed through the formal bushfire information channels listed below:

- Department of Fire Emergency Services website: www.dfes.wa.gov.au .
- Tune into emergency broadcasters: ABC and local commercial radio stations
- Ring the Department of Fire and Emergency Services for emergency information on 13 DFES (13 3337)
- Department of Parks and Wildlife's website: www.dpaw.wa.gov.au

Park closures are likely to be an uncommon occurrence, however each bushfire season is different. Managing bushfire risk under adverse conditions and in remote locations is complex. Should you wish to discuss what may be considered appropriate management actions in relation to your operation on Parks and Wildlife managed-lands in these conditions, please contact your local District office. Alternatively, should you have any lease or licence administration queries please contact Malcolm Briggs for leases (08 9334 0216) or Gerard Ots for licences (08 9334 0516).



Department of
Parks and Wildlife



Information Note

Parks and Wildlife Visitor Management Strategies for Adverse Fire Weather Conditions - March 2014

This information note is to inform people in the recreation and tourism industry of one of the management strategies utilised, by the Department of Parks and Wildlife (Parks and Wildlife), to mitigate bushfire risk to visitors to bushfire prone areas. This strategy involves the closure of Parks and/or recreation sites due to Very High to Catastrophic Fire Danger Ratings.

Over recent years there have been a number of situations involving bushfire prone areas throughout Australia which have caused fire and emergency agencies to review key areas of bushfire management. As the Department of Parks and Wildlife manages significant amounts of bushfire prone areas it is incumbent on the Department to consider information, generated by such reviews, in relation to visitors to national parks and other recreation and tourism opportunities. Parts of these reviews provide information applicable to department-managed lands and the risk people face when in bushfire prone areas during days experiencing dangerous fire weather conditions.

Parks and Wildlife and its predecessors have managed bushfire and other adverse weather event risks to its visitors for decades and during that time the closure of parks and sites has been a risk mitigation tool used by managers. Fire danger related park closures have in general, but not exclusively, been in response to actual fire incidents.

In Western Australia the level of risk that bushfires pose to these areas under adverse conditions is described by DFES's Fire Danger Rating System. This system rates fire danger from Low - Moderate through to Catastrophic as potential fire behaviour increases in ferocity. A key outcome of the Victorian 2009 inquiry was the review of the DFES 'Fire Danger Rating System' and the addition of a 'Catastrophic' category. Also, it recommended the need for clear advice to be provided to the community on what the categories mean and what you should do during those conditions.

The new rating system includes information for categories such as;

- Catastrophic - "Put your survival first and leave bushfire risk areas the night before or early in the day – this is your best option" and;
- Severe & Extreme - "Only stay if you are prepared to the highest level and able to actively defend your home if a fire starts".

Suppression of fires in the upper end of the scale becomes more difficult and in certain conditions impossible. When the fire hazard is elevated suppression can become too difficult or impossible to ensure the safety of life and evacuation is generally the only strategy available. Experience has shown that the timeframes to evacuate visitors from threatened areas and the level of resources required to carry out all aspects of an incident's management overstretch the department's capacity and may compromise visitor and fire fighter safety.

With the severity of fire incidents increasing and the changing public perception toward how government agencies should respond to the threat of bushfire, agencies need to review their management practices regularly. This, and the need to consider the recommendations from inquiries such as that into Victoria's Black Saturday fires of 2009, has resulted in the recent review of the department's procedures and systems when managing recreations areas, visitors and bushfire threat.

There are a range of management or mitigation actions to improve visitor safety available to the department, including but not limited to: early detection; rapid bushfire suppression response; forest fuel hazard reduction through prescribed burning; mechanical fuel reduction and management of visitor exposure to bushfire prone areas. The department uses all of these measures where practicable, however, the effectiveness of some measures are significantly reduced as fire danger levels increase. In addition, the

agency's capacity to adequately respond to new fire incidents is significantly reduced when resources are already committed to bushfire suppression operations elsewhere. More recently the department has formalised and begun implementation of an operational policy: "Closure of Recreation Sites Due to Very High to Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating" to adopt this revised position.

Parks and Wildlife managers are required to work with these new ratings, consider community expectations and determine how the rating system applies to visitors to land managed by the department. Clearly, visitors to Parks and Wildlife managed lands are not in a position to 'defend' and few sites have been identified that provide adequate safety against bushfire risks. All aspects of a park's operation are taken into consideration when determining bushfire risk management, including commercial operations and other planned events. Managers do not take the decision to close areas lightly, understanding fully the potential impacts on the community and businesses. The closure of areas is determined by District and Regional Managers and delegated Duty Officers. The timing of informing the community and commercial operations is a complex issue and may vary slightly depending on BoM forecast information and the occurrence of fires.

Commercial operations licenced by Parks and Wildlife have a list of conditions informing and governing aspects of their operation. Included in licence conditions is advice that "Many parts of Department managed lands may, at some time of the year, be subject to full or partial closure for a variety of reasons". Closures relating to fire or fire risk are put in place for the safety and protection of visitors to a park. The Commercial Operations Licence conditions also state: "No guarantee of access – The operator acknowledges that nothing in the licence guarantees the operator access to any area of Department managed lands and the Director General may, at any time and from time to time, close or restrict access to any area of Department managed lands without prior notice to the operator."

Commercial Lessee's on Parks and Wildlife managed land are included in the distribution of fire danger alerts and notification of park closures, with the onus to manage the safety of visitors to their lease area remaining with the lessee. The exception to this is where the lease is situated within a park that is to be closed. Lessees in this situation should liaise with staff at the local office.

Parks and Wildlife has been reviewing the latest information and further developing plans to manage bushfire risk to visitors in the lead up to this fire season. Recent work has included:

- A focus on the South West forest region's recreation sites and parks (Swan, South West and Warren Regions)
- Identification of bushfire hazard areas
- Assessing risk to visitors
- Determining risk management actions (develop a decision matrix to guide staff in implementing actions)
- Developing a Communication procedures and;
- Developing Standard Operating Procedures for specific sites, parks or groups of parks should closures or evacuations be required.

The vast majority of Parks and Wildlife sites are situated in or adjacent to bushfire prone areas. Visitor perception of bushfire risk and what visitors should do in these areas to stay safe ranges greatly with a significant proportion having little or no knowledge. Parks and Wildlife must consider the level of visitor understanding and the potential for panic reactions when assessing the risk to visitors in bushfire prone areas. In addition to this the following elements are considered when determining management action for each area:

- Forest fuel loading & proximity to visitor areas
- Potential ignition sources – previous history, lightning, arson, accidental
- Protection strategies implemented and effective for the area
- Area terrain – steep, flat
- Difficulty of fire suppression – ease of suppression access, response times,
- Suppression resources available
- Level of vehicle egress, single or multiple routes
- Visibility affected by smoke on egress under key wind directions
- Safe assembly areas/structures
- Visitor numbers
- Visit timing
- Activities undertaken in area

- Spread of visitors across area locations e.g. trails
- Range of visitor type – e.g. children to elderly, disabled, family groups, in cars or buses & on bicycles
- Duration on site
- Entry fee charged
- Likely consequences – fatality, serious injury should a threat be realised.

Other factors beyond the department's control also impact visitor management. In the case of the weekend of 11 & 12 January 2014 some local authorities put a 'Vehicle Movement Ban' in place affecting the Off-road Vehicle Areas of Gnangara and Pinjar, effectively closing the areas to the designated activity. Formal closure of these areas was then implemented by Parks and Wildlife. Elsewhere vehicle movement bans saw the cancellation of 4WD driver training courses.

The events of the Parkerville fire, on 12 January 2014, provide a good example of the nature of the task before Parks and Wildlife managers and highlight the government and community's limited capacity to address fire incidents in adverse weather conditions.

Other parallels in community response to the forecast conditions were also noted, including the closure of all walk trails in Kings Park and the cancellation of events such as horse racing meetings.

Historically, closures due to forecast fire danger ratings number under 5 per year for the metro area. Planning for adverse fire danger ratings will help to lessen the impact on your visitors' experiences and your business. It is suggested that you develop alternative activities for such situations. Liaison with our District office in the area of your operation may assist you in that planning and preparation.

Attachment 2. DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES FIRE DANGER RATING TABLE

FIRE DANGER RATING AND WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU.

	FIRE DANGER RATING	WHAT DOES IT MEAN?	WHAT SHOULD I DO?	
<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 20px;">  </div> <p>Fires can threaten suddenly and without warning.</p> <p>Watch for signs of fire, especially smoke and flames.</p> <p>Know your Fire Danger Rating and be aware of local conditions.</p> <p>Have your bushfire survival plan and kit ready.</p> <p>To seek information listen to local radio, go to www.fesa.wa.gov.au or call the FESA information line on 1300 657 209.</p> <p>Call 000 to report a fire.</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  </div>	CATASTROPHIC 100+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These are the worst conditions for a bush or grass fire. If a fire starts and takes hold, it will be extremely difficult to control and will take significant firefighting resources and cooler conditions to bring it under control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spot fires will start well ahead of the main fire and cause rapid spread of the fire. Embers will come from many directions. Homes are not designed or constructed to withstand fires in these conditions. The only safe place to be is away from bushfire risk areas. 	<p>YOU NEED TO ACT NOW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put your survival first and leave bushfire risk areas the night before or early in the day - this is your best option. Act immediately - do not wait and see: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ leave now ▶ avoid forested areas, thick bush or long, dry grass ▶ take shelter if you cannot leave
	EXTREME 75-99	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These are very hot, dry and windy conditions for a bush or grass fire. If a fire starts and takes hold, it will be unpredictable, move very fast and difficult for firefighters to bring under control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homes that are prepared to the highest level, have been constructed to bushfire protection levels and are actively defended may provide safety. 	<p>YOU NEED TO GET READY TO ACT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only stay with your property if you are prepared to the highest level. This means your home needs to have been constructed to bushfire protection levels eg. enclosed eaves, covers over external air conditioners, metal flyscreens etc. You must be well prepared and able to actively defend your home if a fire starts. This means you have the right equipment and resources to put out fires around your home eg. enough water supply, petrol/diesel portable pump, generator, protective clothing etc. If you are not prepared to the highest level, leaving bushfire risk areas early in the day is your safest option.
	SEVERE 50-74	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spot fires will start and move quickly. Embers may come from many directions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You must be physically and mentally prepared to defend in these conditions. The only safe place to be is away from bushfire risk areas. 	
	VERY HIGH 32-49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These are hot, dry and possibly windy conditions for a bush or grass fire. If a fire starts and takes hold, it may be hard for firefighters to control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well prepared homes that are actively defended can provide safety. You must be physically and mentally prepared to defend in these conditions. 	<p>YOU NEED TO BE AWARE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well prepared homes that are actively defended can provide safety. This means you have the right equipment and resources to put out fires around your home eg. enough water supply, petrol/diesel portable pump, generator, protective clothing etc.
	HIGH 12-31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a fire starts, it is likely to be controlled in these conditions and homes can provide safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Controlled burning may occur in these conditions if it is safe – check to see if permits apply. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check your bushfire survival plan Monitor conditions Action may be needed Leave if necessary
	LOW-MODERATE 0-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware of how fires can start and reduce the risk. 		

PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

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Attachment 3. BoM FIRE WEATHER FORECAST AREAS



