

**“Out of control –
DEC’s annual south-west burning frenzy”**

Beth Schultz

For

Perth Region NRM’s East Reference Group

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Area prescribe burnt by CALM (now DEC) and area burnt in wildfires in the South-West (Swan, South-West and Warren Forest Regions) 1994- 2010

CALM/DEC Annual Report	Area (ha) of prescribed burns ¹	Area (ha) of wildfires ²	Total area burnt prescribed burns and wildfires ³
1994-1995	225,716	29,051	254,767
1995-1996	233,758	10,101	243,859
1996-1997	210,606	18,443	229,049
1997-1998	167,151	76,798	243,949
1998-1999	98,117	9,148	107,265
1999-2000	174,455	10,866	185,321
2000-2001	87,866	14,647	102,513
2001-2002	74,739	18,989	93,728
2002-2003	144,835	139,744	284,579
2003-2004	192,119	22,226	214,345
2004-2005	213,102	50,569	263,671
2005-2006	194,105	21,905	216,010
2006-2007	138,602	31,774	170,376
2007-2008	143,681	9,862	153,543
2008-2009	151,818	23,910	175,728
2009-2010	212,017	47,380	259,397

1 These figures include silviculture burns in native forests and plantations.

2 These figures include wildfires on private property and Unallocated Crown Land attended and monitored by DEC.

3 DEC aims to prescribe burn 200,000 ha in the South-West every year. It does not count the area burnt in wildfires towards the target figure. **If the area burnt in wildfires is included, DEC has met its target in nine out of the last 16 years.**

Sussex burn – April 2011



BEFORE....











Firefighters tend to Bengier Swamp Nature Reserve as it burns out of control on Saturday. PICTURE: JON GELLWEILER

Experiment goes wrong

By HAYDN TUIA

AN experimental burn by the Department of Environment and Conservation re-ignited to rage out of control at the weekend threatening homes and burning about 360ha around Bengier Swamp Nature Reserve.

Ninety firefighters battled the fire supported by three fixed wing water bombers, a helicopter and 24 bushfire appliances and five heavy earthmoving vehicles.

A number of kangaroos died from heat exposure and three quar-

ters of the reserve which is home to the critically-listed Australasian Bittern went up in flames.

The fire was reported at 10.20am on Saturday and grew quickly to threaten homes and South Western Highway as it burned 24ha of private property causing damage to crops and fences.

A 3ha burn was conducted by the DEC near the site on Thursday which had been mopped up and listed as safe following a Saturday morning inspection completed at 9.30am.

District manager for the Wellington district Drew Griffiths said the DEC would conduct a full assessment of the damage and make repairs.

"We're putting our hand up to say it looks like it's come from our burn unfortunately and we'll be looking at ourselves very carefully to see how we missed that and then make sure we put things in place so that doesn't happen again," Mr Griffiths said.

Fire crews remained in the area

until Sunday as they struggled to contain intense flames.

Bengier dairy farmer Michael Giumelli watched the fire from his property just 500m away.

"It was very strange because the fire was actually heading in a north-west direction even though the wind was coming from that way - I guess there was so much fuel down there that it had a mind of its own," Mr Giumelli said.

"If the wind were to have changed we would have been in the manure."

**Bengier
Swamp
Nature
Reserve**
April 2011

Wiltshire Butler National Park burn – October 2010












Escaped prescribed burn in Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park April 2006





Smoke from a prescribed burn in Bottlebrush block
blanketing a farm near Nannup



**Habitat
tree burnt
out at the
butt by
wildfire or
prescribed
burning or
both**



**Old growth
tingle tree
on fire in a
prescribed
burn near
Walpole**



Stockpile of mainly old growth logs unsuitable for sawmilling because of internal defects



Several thousand years of accumulated organic matter burnt to bare mineral earth by an escaped prescribed burn



Verge repeatedly burnt now covered with highly flammable *tambooki* grass and no native vegetation





**Wildfire that stopped in a pine plantation,
presumably because of a wind change**

Summary of reasons large-scale repeated frequent prescribed burning is undesirable.

- It kills wildlife, including many endangered species, and destroys their habitat, and makes wildlife more vulnerable to fox and cat predation.
- It removes native species that are not able to tolerate frequent burning.
- It encourages weeds and fire-prone regrowth and reduces moisture, making forests and bushlands more fire-prone, not less.
- A target of 200,00 ha/yr encourages burning on a scale that cannot be adequately managed, thereby creating risk to firefighters, communities and property through escapes, especially when prescribed burns are lit during periods of high fire danger.
- It has adverse health and economic impacts via smoke.

Required reading

- Clarke, Michael F. (2008). Catering for the needs of fauna in fire management: science or just wishful thinking? *Wildlife Research*, 35, 385–394
- Cary, Geoffrey et al. (2009). Relative importance of fuel management, ignition management and weather for area burned: evidence from five landscape–fire–succession models *International Journal of Wildland Fire* 18,147–156
- Parr, Catherine I and Anderson, Alan N (2009). Patch mosaic burning for biodiversity conservation: a critique of the pyrodiversity paradigm. *Conservation Biology* Volume 20, No. 6, 1610-1619
- Bradshaw, Don S, Dixon, Kingsley W, Hopper, Stephen D, Lambers, Hans and Turner, Shane R (2011). Little evidence for fire-adapted plant traits in Mediterranean climate regions *Trends in Plant Science*, Vol. 16, No. 2 69-76