

Increasing Comprehension of Fire Management Plans

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Abstract

Fire management planning can often be a complex issue involving comment and varying opinions from a number of stakeholders. Traditional reports are often cumbersome and complex, reducing their potential used and comprehension. Eco Logical Australia adopted the use of poster based plans, providing the potential for increased understanding and adoption by all stakeholders.

Introduction

Management of fire has the potential to dramatically affect an area and as such is often a highly emotive issue, complicated by conflicting management approaches and objectives. These issues are often compounded by the use of large complex and unwieldy fire management plan documents.

Traditionally, a fire management plan consists of a written report which contains all the relevant information required for fire management. These reports however, do not always allow for ease of use or concise presentation of the key elements required for fire management. In order to provide an easy to follow, concise and relevant plan for land managers, we have adopted the use of poster based plans, providing all necessary information for operational management in one place.

Methods

Planning for fire management requires an integrated approach. Factors that should be included with such planning include:

- Site context in relation to fire;
- Vegetation communities;
- Aquatic environments (wetlands, rivers, dams);
- Built assets;
- Presence of threatened species, communities or populations;
- Fire history; and
- Weed mapping and bush regeneration works.

Fire management plan posters consist of a map based approach, providing a summary of the information required for the key management factors. The maps shown on the poster include clear information on vegetation, assets, fire history, prescribed fire management zones and works schedules for an area with the appropriate context for the land manager to implement the plan.

These posters are supported by the provision of a brief methodology report. For smaller sites, all management information is able to be conveyed within the poster. Larger sites may require additional information in a report as a supporting document for reference.

Discussion

The provision of plans in this format increases the ease with which plans are comprehended. This assists in the draft comment processes and periods of public exhibition. During this time plans may be reviewed by individuals who have minimal fire management training or are short on time. It is believed that though the use of poster based maps, the effectiveness of plan review and comments may be increased for both the people reviewing and for individuals responsible for assessing submissions / comments.

The poster format is often faster and more cost effective to update than written reports and may allow for easier visual comparison of alterations from one version to another.

The provision of consolidated information as a visual package in one place may also encourage / facilitate the plan review by first time fire management plan users and non-fire related managers, encouraging a more comprehensive / holistic management approach.

Poster based reports also provide faster reference for use in emergency situations, where a poster may be taken out into the field for reference (posters may indicate areas where fire is to be excluded, including Fire Exclusion Zones, threatened species locations, riparian water quality buffers).

The creation of fire management plans as map based posters provides a significant shift in the presentation of fire management planning. The format allows for a potential increase in plan acceptance, comprehension and appropriate implementation.