

Chapter 1: January 2003 bushfires in the ACT

1.1 What happened?

In early January 2003 a 'dry' thunderstorm occurred across the highlands of the ACT, NSW and Victoria, causing many lightning strikes and forest fires in mountainous country. In the ACT there were initially three fires, with others just across the border in NSW.

Then, on Thursday 16 and Friday 17 of January, as a result of changing weather conditions these fires began to expand significantly. On Saturday 18 January, the incredibly strong winds and high temperatures brought the fires into the urban area of Canberra, with loss of life, housing and other property.

Effectively, all the original fires combined into one huge fire front, which blackened over 70% of the ACT and impacted huge areas across the Upper Murrumbidgee catchment.

1.2 CAMPFIRE

As a response to these events Waterwatch in collaboration with the Cooperative Research Centre for Freshwater Ecology (CRCFE) initiated a community Waterwatch monitoring program that aimed to monitor the effects of bushfires on our waterways. This program has become known as **CAMPFIRE** (Community Assessment Monitoring Program for Fire Impacted River Ecology). Campfire is a network of existing and new community monitoring groups that work in partnership to monitor the ecological effects of the bushfires on our waterways and catchments.

1.3 Year 2 Report

The CAMPFIRE Year 2 Report continues the investigation into the impacts of the January 2003 bushfires on waterways in the ACT. The report uses information and data collected by ACT Waterwatch Volunteers who have been actively monitoring water quality in the ACT for many years.

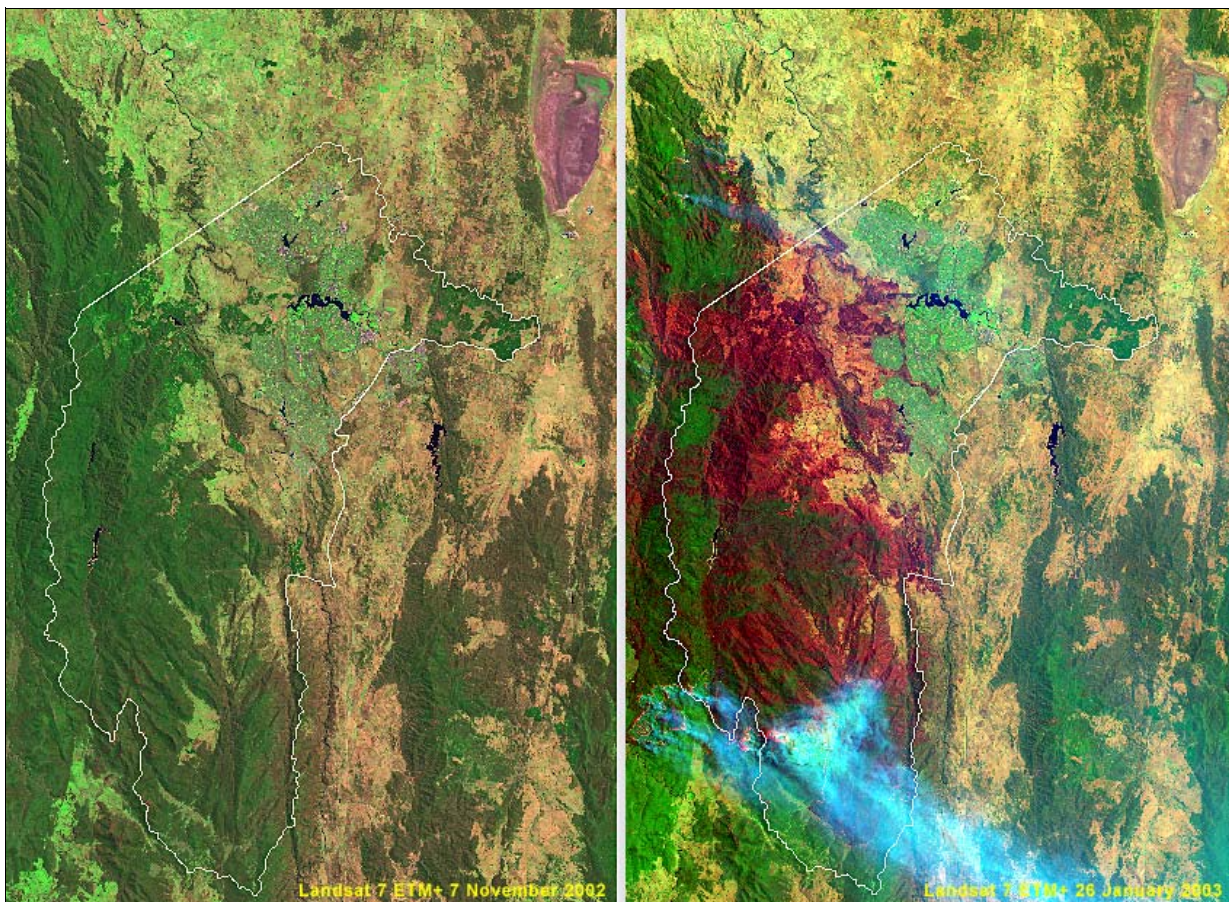


Figure 1: Satellite images of the ACT before and after the 2003 bushfires

1.4 Extent of fire and fire severity

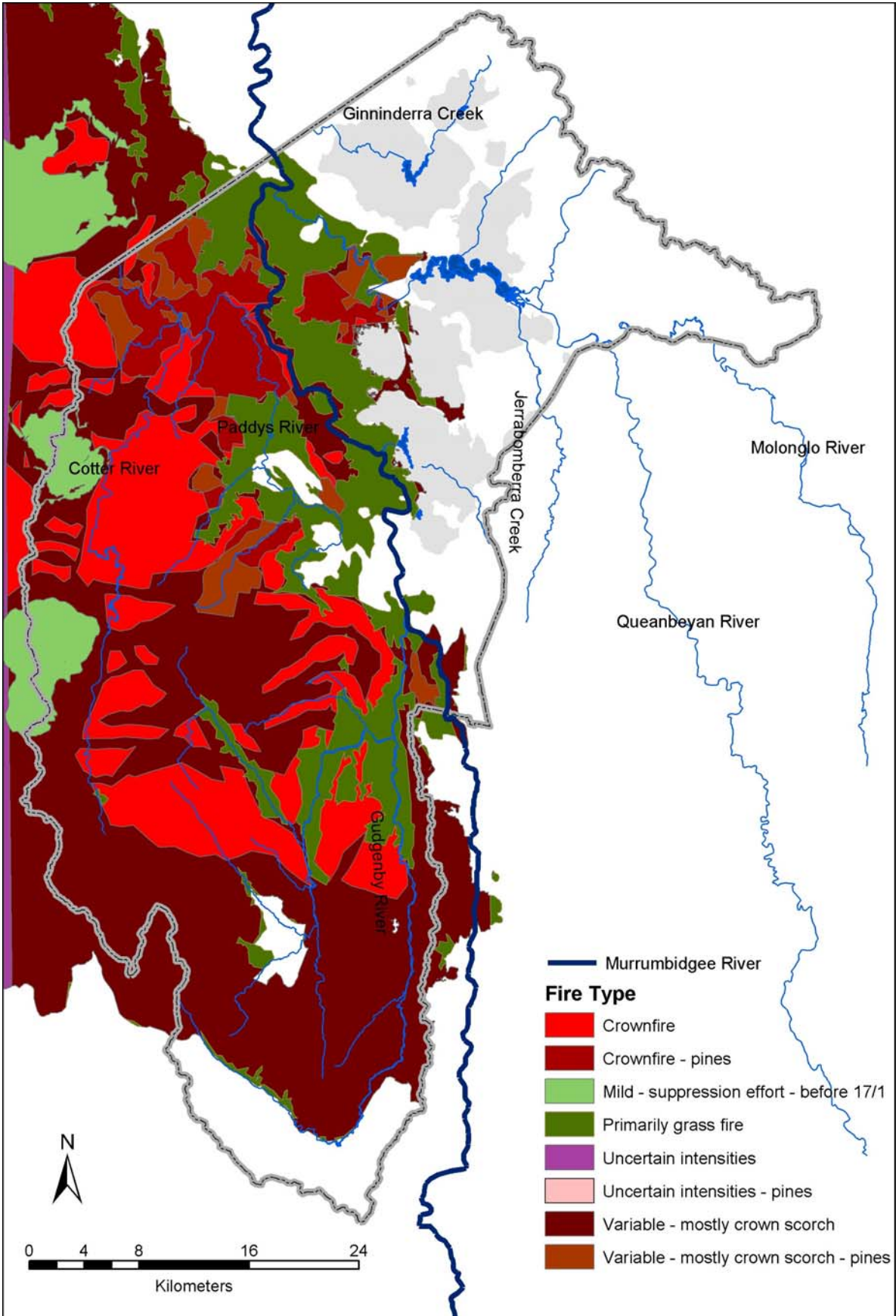


Figure 2: Extent and severity of the Canberra 2003 bushfires