



ACT BUSHFIRE AND FLOOD RECOVERY PLAN

SEPTEMBER 2020



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal people. We recognise the special relationship and connection that they have with this Country. Ngunnawal people are a thriving community whose life and culture are intrinsically connected to this land in a way that is core to their physical and spiritual wellbeing their cultural practices, and continuation of their law and lore.

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STATEMENT FROM MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

Mick Gentleman MLA

Following the summer's severe bushfires and floods, the ACT Government has been working hard to respond to the most immediate threats in impacted areas of Namadgi National Park, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and the ACT's rural lands.

Green shoots of recovery can be seen across the 88,000 hectares of land that was burnt and people are once again returning to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and some of their favourite places in Namadgi National Park.

The recovery of our landscapes, cultural sites and ecosystems is ongoing. The ACT's natural and rural areas are still feeling the impacts of the extreme dry conditions experienced over the last few years and will continue to face significant changes in our climate.

While our initial steps to recovery have placed the ACT in a strong position to respond to bushfire impacts, the development of a Recovery Plan to guide our actions is critical to enable long-term recovery. A carefully planned and resourced approach to recovery is needed to protect the environmental and cultural values of Namadgi National Park for the Canberra community into the future.

DHAWURA NGUNNAWAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT

The Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee would like to acknowledge the work of the ACT Government in their engagement with the committee during the time of the Orroral Valley fire.



The committee appreciates the work that was undertaken to include Ngunnawal people in the decision-making processes to protect Ngunnawal cultural sites and objects and being able to be part of the ongoing fire recovery process. The committee would also like to extend our thanks for the opportunity that was provided to the committee and the United Ngunnawal Elders Council to visit Namadgi National Park post-fire to see the damage and to visit one of our significant cultural sites to begin the healing process. The ongoing partnership between the ACT Government and the Ngunnawal people has great value to the Ngunnawal people and the committee would like to acknowledge the work that has been done to recognise and support the cultural rights of the Ngunnawal people in the management of Country.





This Recovery Plan responds directly to the risks identified in the Rapid Risk Assessment Team Report. It builds on the rapid response actions that have been completed in the initial six months following the fires and storms of 2020. It sets out the medium to long term recovery actions that will be required to effectively respond to these disasters.

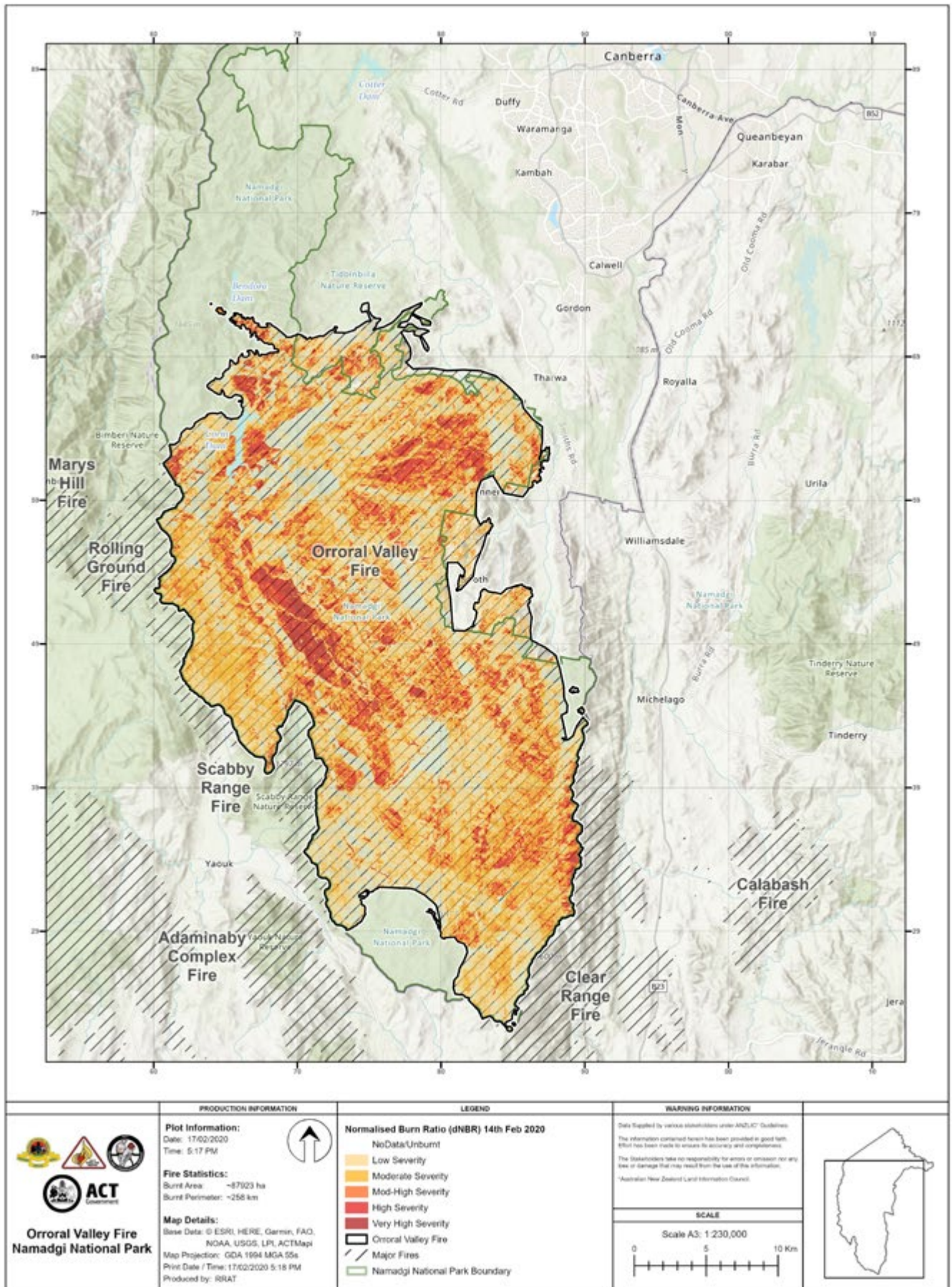
BACKGROUND

Bushfires

The 2019-20 fire season in Australia was one of the worst on record, with over 18 million hectares of land burned across the country. The ACT suffered two major bushfires, the Beard bushfire and Orroral Valley bushfire, which together burnt nearly 90,000 hectares including around 80% of Namadgi National Park. Fortunately, there was no loss of human life.

The Beard bushfire started on Wednesday 22 January in Pialligo Redwood Park and spread east towards Canberra, with properties threatened in Beard, Oaks Estate and West Queanbeyan. The fire was brought under control by the end of Thursday 23 January and declared out at 424 hectares on Tuesday 28 January.

The Orroral Valley fire started in grassland on Monday 27 January 2020 in Namadgi National Park. The fire spread was driven predominantly by topography and exceptionally dry fuel loads, and its intensity varied widely across the fireground. Suppression operations and rain across the fireground (~158 mm between 10 and 14 February) led to containment of the fire at approximately 88,000 hectares. The fire was declared out on 27 February 2020.



Storms

Over the weekend of 7-8 February 2020, severe storms passed through the ACT causing wide scale flooding in Canberra and its surrounds. Both Namadgi and Tidbinbilla suffered significant damage to roads and infrastructure, including fences and culverts. The storms mobilised large amounts of sediment and ash throughout the landscape; the fact that much of the land was recently burned and devoid of vegetation compounded the damaging effects of the heavy rain. Floodwaters damaged infrastructure such as road crossings and the effects of ash and sediment on water quality in the ACT's main drinking water catchment are continuing to unfold.

Climate Change

Scientists, land managers and fire fighters witnessed unprecedented seasonal conditions in the lead up to and during the ACT bushfires and floods. Many areas within the parks were showing significant dieback in eucalypts and unusually low fuel moisture levels. Fire behaviour and dominant weather systems during the event were reported to be atypical.

By 2030, the ACT is expected to experience an increase in all average, maximum and minimum temperatures by up to 0.7°C. Heatwaves (days above 35°C) will increase and cold nights, below 2°C, will decrease.

Projections indicate annual rainfall across the ACT region will decrease, particularly in spring and summer, but will increase in autumn. Although the ACT's climate is naturally variable from year to year, the Territory is likely to experience:

- » an increase in average and severe fire weather;
- » changes in the seasonal patterns of fires;
- » an increase in the frequency of extreme weather events;
- » greater run-off from storms and higher evaporation from overall higher temperatures leading to:
 - less water being available for consumption both by the community and the natural environment; and
 - a decrease in water quality.
- » more frequent and more severe droughts; and
- » increased atmospheric CO₂.

Climate change is altering the structure and function of natural ecosystems and species, affecting heritage assets, economic activity and human wellbeing. A certain amount of change is inevitable, and the ACT must prepare accordingly. Bushfire and flood recovery planning, decisions and the implementation of management actions will need to consider and incorporate climate change projections in order to ensure the long-term viability of environmental, cultural and built assets and infrastructure.



RAPID RISK ASSESSMENT TEAM REPORT

The Government deployed an ACT-lead team, called the Rapid Risk Assessment Team (RRAT), to undertake an immediate assessment of the burned area as soon as it was safe to do so. In February 2020, a multidisciplinary team of 13 people conducted a five-day assessment.

The team undertook a combination of desktop and on-ground studies and produced a report (the RRAT Report) which identifies 27 key risks arising from the bushfires and storms. These risks cover the following themes:

- » Impacts on and threats to cultural and historic heritage.
- » Threats to public safety (roads and walking tracks, damaged trees).
- » Impacts on and threats to biodiversity.
- » Impacts on and threats to water quality and water catchments.
- » Damage to assets (fencing and visitor infrastructure).

The RRAT Report includes recommendations for management and mitigation of these risks. Many of the recommendations emphasise the need for more detailed assessments to fully inform recovery activities. These recommendations have formed the basis of the Government's initial bushfire recovery response.

The RRAT Report was released on 3 March 2020 by the Chief Minister and the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. The report can be found at: www.environment.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1495236/orroral-valley-fire-rapid-risk-assessment-namadgi-national-park.pdf.





RAPID RESPONSE ACTIONS

Immediate recovery actions focused on key risks to wildlife and ecosystem function, cultural and historic heritage, water quality, hillslope erosion, assets and infrastructure, and community safety. This has included work to:

- » clear fallen or unstable trees around roads, walking tracks and fire trails;
- » complete condition assessments and audits of all walking tracks and trails;
- » undertake stabilisation works to reduce sediment entering our waterways in high risk areas;
- » complete catchment hydrology surveys;
- » complete threatened species surveys;
- » protect Alpine Bogs and Fens (a threatened ecological community);
- » control invasive weeds in targeted areas;
- » detect and monitor vertebrate pests (e.g. feral pigs, deer, horses); and
- » conduct heritage assessments with Traditional Custodians, archaeologists and heritage experts.



The COVID-19 health emergency has presented and continues to present many challenges to ongoing recovery efforts. To deliver jobs, support local business and help the environment, Government has worked with industry to repair and replace 19 kilometres of rural land fences damaged in the bushfires as part of the fast-track infrastructure program. Recovery efforts have also been supported with the employment of additional rangers and field officers through the Jobs for Canberrans COVID-19 stimulus project to repair walking trails and undertake critical restoration work in the Cotter Catchment. These projects are helping protect our catchment, support the Territory's bushfire recovery efforts and keep Canberra working through the current health emergency.



ACT RECOVERY PLAN

Access to the wild places of Namadgi is an important part of our way of life. Many Canberrans visit the Park on a regular basis to enjoy its beautiful scenery and wildlife, for outdoor recreation activities, and to spend time in nature with family and friends.

The 2020 bushfires and floods had a devastating impact on the environmental, cultural, amenity and service values of Namadgi National Park. While aspects of these will recover over time, there is a real danger that some of those things that make Namadgi such a special place will be lost if we do not take action to repair damage and manage threats arising from the 2020 disasters.

This Recovery Plan has been developed to guide recovery actions and will focus on responding to the residual risks outlined in the RRAT Report. Its guiding principles commit the Government to work in genuine collaboration with Canberra's communities, make informed decisions underpinned by sound research and science, and consider and respond to the ongoing impacts of a changing climate.

RECOVERY PRINCIPLES

The following principles will guide the response to the recovery of fire and flood affected areas:

- » Traditional Custodians, the Ngunnawal people, Representative Aboriginal Organisations, and the Government will heal Country and walk the journey to recovery together.
- » Environmental integrity and ecosystem functions will be restored through assisting natural processes.
- » Heritage values will be conserved through collaboration and contemporary and traditional practices.
- » Canberra's communities of recreational, conservation and interest groups will be meaningfully engaged throughout the recovery process.
- » Recovery actions will consider ecosystem drivers and be underpinned by sound science, credible research and best practice techniques.
- » Damaged infrastructure will be built back better and more resilient to future disasters.

CASE STUDY: WORKING WITH TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS

The ACT's Traditional Custodians, the Ngunnawal people, have a profound cultural and spiritual connection to the fire and flood impacted areas as well as the broader region. The Aboriginal history of the region dates back over 25,000 years, and Traditional Custodians maintain a deep connection to Namadgi National Park. Since the fires a series of on-Country yarns with the Ngunnawal Community and Aboriginal organisations have been held. Government is committed to working closely with the Ngunnawal community on every step of the recovery journey.

In responding to the risks identified in the RRAT Report, EPSDD has been working with heritage specialists and Representative Aboriginal Organisations (RAOs) to assess any damage to cultural sites and artefacts from the fire and storms. This includes both registered heritage sites, and areas where the construction of earth

fire breaks has disturbed the soil and potentially uncovered undiscovered artefacts. At the time of writing, the majority of known rock art and stone arrangement sites in Namadgi National Park have been surveyed. Thankfully, no fire damage has been recorded at any of these sites. Aboriginal representatives have been involved in all of this survey work and are being closely consulted regarding their management into the future. Surveys are still ongoing in both the Orroral Valley and Beard fire grounds.

With bushfires likely to become more frequent and intense due to climate change, discussions are underway between EPSDD and Traditional Custodians, including RAOs and the Dhawura Ngunnawal Committee, to determine whether changes to management practices in the Park can better protect these sites from the effects of bushfire.

RECOVERY OBJECTIVES

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

'To realise the Rapid Risk Assessment Team Report's goals through a coordinated, effective and immediate response to actions identified through the report to reduce the immediate and long-term impacts of floods and fire in relevant areas'

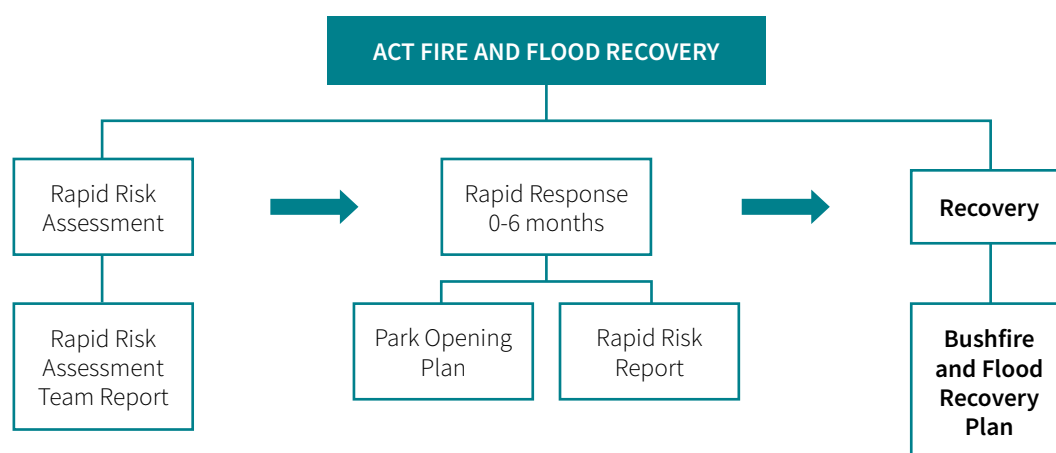
SECONDARY OBJECTIVE

'To identify areas where further assessment of the impacts of the 2020 fire and floods is required, including for the Beard Fire and agricultural lands'



THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

The diagram below shows the steps towards recovery. The RRAT Report and rapid response actions have been addressed above, and in the Rapid Response Report released by the Minister in July. The Recovery Plan builds on the RRAT Report and the immediate response, and details the long term activity necessary for recovery.



RECOVERY ACTIONS

Extreme and immediate risks identified in the RRAT Report have been addressed through rapid response actions during the first phase of the recovery program. These initial steps to recovery have placed the ACT in a strong position to develop a long-term response to bushfire impacts.

Beyond the rapid response, a number of longer-term recovery projects have been planned and delivery will begin in 2020. Priorities include ongoing flora and fauna impact assessments, heritage assessments, reopening of Namadgi National Park, repair and rebuilding of trails, protection and recovery of bogs and fens, and work to stabilise drinking water catchments and manage threats from erosion.

Further information on these projects will be available on the ACT Government [Environment website](#) as the Bushfire and Flood Recovery Plan progresses.

Environment

VALUES

Namadgi National Park encompasses habitats ranging from grassy plains through snow gum forests to alpine meadows. These landscapes are home to threatened and vulnerable plants and animals, as well as the rich and complex habitats and ecosystems which support them.

The Park also plays a critical role in providing Canberra and Queanbeyan with safe drinking water. Rain filtering through the network of wetlands and waterways in Namadgi flows into the Cotter River and the storage dams which supply approximately 85% of Canberra's water. It is because of this natural filtration system that this catchment yields the exceptionally high-quality water for which Canberra is known.

THREATS

Many of Namadgi's plants, animals and ecological communities have been impacted by the fires and floods. Individual plants and animals that survived the fire itself will still be affected by loss of habitat and increased risk of predation. Native plants and

ecological communities are at risk from new weed invasions across the fire-affected area. This may lead to disruption of natural regenerative processes, and negatively alter ecosystems. The lack of vegetation cover has left native fauna exposed to predation by feral pests (such as foxes and cats) and in competition with feral herbivores (such as deer and pigs) for food.

The ACT's primary water source begins in Namadgi National Park in a network of alpine wetlands that hold and filter rainwater, slowly releasing it into the Cotter River. This flows into the Corin, Bendora and eventually Cotter dams. Fire is known to have significant and large-scale impacts on water quality, including increased sedimentation, increased concentrations of metals (e.g. iron, manganese) and warmer water temperatures due to loss of riparian cover; this increases the risk of algal blooms. Many of these impacts are intensified during storm events, as has occurred in 2020, which move large amounts of sediment, ash and debris into waterways.





Climate change, particularly through rising temperatures, magnifies existing pressures and threats to native species and ecosystems. More frequent fires and floods will alter the abundance and geographic range of many native species by restricting or shifting movement within the landscape, and interfering with lifecycles. Research into the potential impact of climate change on invasive species indicates that the number of weed species and pest animals (including species not currently recognised as pests) is likely to increase through new invasions across an extended range, out-competing native species.

ACTIONS

To assist natural regenerative processes, the ACT Government has worked in collaboration with the Australian Government, field experts and key community partners to develop a suite of targeted environmental recovery projects. Each project has been developed to address risks to flora, fauna and catchment health identified in the RRAT Report. Together with natural regenerative processes, projects addressing these risks will support long-term protection, recovery and resilience of affected fauna, flora and catchment health across the fire-affected areas of Namadgi National Park and the ACT. The ACT Government's environmental projects will form the core of its recovery process.

All projects will be subject to ongoing monitoring and adaptive management. Additional projects may be developed in response to emerging trends or environmental drivers which are identified as recovery progresses, and as understanding of impacts across the fire-affected area evolves. Opportunities to engage the community in on-ground actions for fire recovery will be explored wherever possible and may include flora and fauna surveys, weed management and recovery plantings.

The ACT Government has been working with the Australian Government's Wildlife and Threatened Species Bushfire Recovery Expert Panel and the

National Bushfire Recovery Agency throughout the recovery process. Together, with funding made available through the Australian Government, the ACT Government will commence the following priority projects focused on protecting the environment:

- » restoring and protecting the ACT's Alpine Sphagnum Bogs and Associated Fens ecological communities
- » protecting Namadgi National Park's native ecosystems from invasive plants post-fire
- » understanding the effect of fire on predator diet composition (foxes and cats)
- » frog survival and recovery in the ACT
- » protecting the endangered Broad-toothed Rat – population genetics analysis and assisted recolonisation post-fire
- » post-fire protection of high priority threatened flora species in Namadgi National Park.

The ACT Government is also funding projects to:

- » develop and implement catchment scale hydrological monitoring framework
- » develop assessment methods and undertake field work to assess hillslope erosion, road drainage and riparian areas
- » implement erosion management actions
- » research and monitoring to model catchment responses to a range of fire scenarios.

A number of additional projects to address the impacts of bushfires and assist with recovery are being developed together with key partners such as Landcare ACT (a peak body for Southern ACT Catchment Group, Molonglo Catchment Group, Ginninderra Catchment Group, the ACT Rural Landholders' Association and Buru Ngunawal Aboriginal Corporation).

Information on environmental projects which are underway or planned will be available on the ACT Government [Environment website](#) as the Bushfire and Flood Recovery Plan progresses.



Heritage

VALUES

The Aboriginal history of the ACT region dates back over 25,000 years, and Aboriginal cultural values are embedded throughout the landscapes of Namadgi National Park and other fire-impacted areas, as well as in places and objects such as ceremonial sites, art sites, cultural trees, grinding grooves and artefact scatters. Evidence of 19th and 20th century European settlement is also found throughout the Park.

The only currently known Aboriginal art sites in the ACT occur in Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. An example is the Yankee Hat art sites, located within Namadgi in the Gudgenby Valley in a complex of boulders at the foot of Yankee Hat Mountain.

IMPACTS AND THREATS

A large number of Aboriginal artefacts and cultural sites are known to exist in Namadgi National Park and other fire-affected areas. Loss of vegetation as a result of the bushfires is likely to have exposed artefacts on the surface, increasing the likelihood of damage through movement of soil and erosion during the subsequent floods. As noted in the RRAT Report, disturbance may also have occurred during the construction of earthwork firebreaks as part of preparations for firefighting.

Fortunately, rapid response surveys did not find any damage to known Aboriginal rock art sites or stone arrangement as a direct result of the fire. However a number of factors associated with climate change,

including atmospheric conditions, rainfall patterns, rock moisture, pH and more frequent fires, represent an ongoing threat to cultural sites in the region.

Two stockmen's huts, which form part of a cross-border network of Alpine huts with ongoing cultural value to hikers and special interest groups, were destroyed in the fire. Fire impacts on other historic heritage sites within the fire-affected area, such as border markers, are the subject of ongoing investigations.

ACTIONS

Work is still ongoing to finish the extensive heritage assessments which were a recommendation of the RRAT Report. It is anticipated that the assessments will include recommendations for longer term management actions for some of the sites, and these will form the basis of heritage recovery actions in the Recovery Plan.



Any recovery actions involving registered heritage sites will be subject to approval by the ACT Heritage Council.

Based on preliminary results from the assessments, for Aboriginal heritage these actions are likely to include:

- » Management of vegetation around Aboriginal cultural sites, to reduce the risk to the sites from future bushfires.
- » Re-establishment of the Aboriginal Rock Art Monitoring Group facilitated for the Ngunnawal Community by EPSDD.
- » Investigation of other partnership-based approaches to the custodianship of Aboriginal heritage within Namadgi National Park, including through the Dhawura Ngunnawal Committee.
- » Relocation of disturbed artefacts to a safe location on-Country, as close as possible to the location where they were discovered.

For historic heritage, a key recommendation of the specialist assessment of the damaged huts is to work closely with the Kosciusko Huts Association (KHA), an important stakeholder in the management of historic alpine huts. KHA will be involved in any agreed restoration or commemorative work associated with the destroyed huts.





Built Assets and Infrastructure

VALUES

Built assets and infrastructure are used throughout Namadgi National Park to facilitate access and improve visitor experience for the public, and for management purposes. In addition to their amenity values, park infrastructure also represents millions of dollars of investment by the ACT Government over a number of decades.

IMPACTS AND THREATS

Based on information collected by PCS rangers, it is estimated that over 8,000 park assets were damaged by the bushfire and subsequent floods. This includes walking trails, steps, erosion bars, signs, wayfinding markers, retaining walls, engineered walkways and bridges.

With an increase in the likelihood of fire, changes in seasonal pattern of fires, and extreme weather events, built assets and infrastructure across the fire impacted area will continue to be at risk. Management of emerging risks and capitalising on opportunities to build resilience into the ACT's parks must be considered throughout the recovery process.

ACTIONS

Government's immediate priority has been to re-open the park to the public. Reopening is taking place in stages as new areas of the park are progressively made safe for visitors. Recovery of built assets will consist of a range of works including:

- » replacement of boundary fencing
- » walking trail repairs

- » replacement of visitor infrastructure such as bridges and boardwalks
- » repairing and improving signage and wayfinders.

Work is ongoing to catalogue and assess park infrastructure with the intent of determining the most appropriate replacement options. While the damage caused by the fire is devastating, it does present Government with an opportunity to standardise designs and materials used for asset construction across Namadgi National Park. It will also enable Government to 'build back better' to ensure that replacement infrastructure is more resilient to future bushfires and other extreme weather events.

This will reduce asset replacement costs in the long term, while offering immediate opportunities to support local businesses through difficult times. The 'build back better' principle will also provide benefits for park amenity, public safety and user experience.

Meaningful engagement with Traditional Custodians with respect to design, content and materials will occur in depth on a few significant projects and more generally with overall design needs across the park.



CASE STUDY: BOUNDARY FENCING

Approximately 65km of park boundary fencing was damaged in the Orroral Valley bushfire. Jobs for Canberrans (JFC) recruits cleared damaged fence lines of vegetation by hand, enabling boundary fences to be replaced in areas where the use of machinery was not possible.

To date, approximately \$650,000 has been spent by the ACT Government to restore park boundary fencing, protecting natural landscapes from livestock damage.

The continued use of additional labour is essential to achieve this program, which is well beyond the business as usual level of resourcing within the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. The labour is a cost-effective approach to rebuilding in sensitive or inaccessible areas where use of machinery is precluded. The economic stimulus arranged last financial year has enabled 19km of fire and storm damaged leaseholder/national park boundary fence to be replaced.



CASE STUDY: YANKEE HAT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT — BUILDING BACK BETTER

Yankee Hat Rock Art site is one of most well-known and significant cultural sites for Traditional Custodians and the wider community in Namadgi National Park. Protection and interpretation of such sites is a delicate balance between the benefits of education and the respect of and observance of cultural practices.

The viewing platform at Yankee Hat was removed prior to the fire as a precautionary measure. This proved to be the correct decision, as the fire was active through this area and if the platform had remained in place it is highly likely that it would have burned and that the rock paintings would have been badly damaged.

In rebuilding visitor infrastructure and interpretive elements at Yankee Hat, there is an opportunity to meaningfully engage with Traditional Custodians throughout the process of design, construction and interpretation of a new walk through Gudgenby Valley. This would highlight not only the art site but the broader cultural significance and traditional management of the area. Traditional Custodians will lead the selection of stories, images and language they would like to share at these places.

The valley also contains post-settlement heritage sites, and information about this part of the Park's history could be incorporated into a new walking trail. The project is an opportunity to realise this innovative approach, providing best practice cultural preservation and enhancing community awareness of the significance of this area for both Aboriginal people and settlers.



BEFORE



AFTER



Responding to climate change

The RRAT Report recommends that detailed recovery planning and programming of works by the Government consider climate change projections so that recovery efforts are effective in the long term. As part of the Recovery Plan, Government is committed to ensuring climate change is considered in all decisions made on recovery efforts. This commitment will be supported through a Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Decision Tool for bushfire recovery. The Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Decision Tool will provide a plan of action to adapt to and address climate change risks exacerbated by the 2020 fires and floods. It will ensure a consistent and transparent approach to recovery decisions and future management under changing climate scenarios.

The Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Decision Tool will aim to:

- » Build an understanding of exposure to climate change of fire-affected areas and identify any ongoing impacts on natural recovery processes.
- » Provide a framework for mid- to long-term recovery decisions to consider and adapt to climate change risks.

In addition, Government is working to ensure all environmental recovery projects are designed to maximise the resilience of species, communities and catchment processes considering climate change.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS, NEIGHBOURS AND COMMUNITY

Stakeholder engagement is a crucial part of the bushfire recovery program as there is a high level of interest from the community.

The ACT Government will work to build on our strong and trusted relationships with stakeholders by being proactive, open and transparent, and by exploring meaningful opportunities to involve and support them in the recovery process. Bushfire recovery will be a collective effort, and effective coordination of the skills and experience of the ACT's volunteers, community groups, industry, universities and other research institutions to complement the Government's approach will be a key element of the recovery program.



Rural landholders

Rural communities in the southern ACT were significantly affected by the bushfires, suffering damage to assets and infrastructure, loss of pasture for livestock, and loss of natural assets such as areas of important native vegetation. The Australian Government has offered assistance for primary producers impacted by bushfire through its Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, under the National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements. The ACT Government will assist landholders with grant administration and support to access this funding where applicable.

The ACT Government is also supporting its rural neighbours through the fast-tracking of the boundary fence replacement program, which has been delivered through the COVID-19 stimulus package.

Icon Water

Icon Water is a key stakeholder in bushfire recovery as its business is heavily reliant on water quality and catchment function. Icon Water actively worked with ACT Emergency Services Agency and ACT Parks and Conservation Service on immediate catchment stabilisation efforts by undertaking early erosion control works. This involved placing silt curtains in Bendora and Corin Dams, and the installation of coir logs in high erosion areas within their catchments. EPSDD will continue to design and implement catchment works in partnership with Icon Water.

Community groups

Canberra is fortunate to have many environmental community groups, who have demonstrated a strong commitment to bushfire recovery. This is evident through co-designing bushfire recovery projects, applying for funding, and engaging hundreds of volunteers with an interest in participating in the bushfire recovery efforts.

This necessitated the development of a Community Partnerships Plan to outline how government and community can work together. The Plan was developed over two community environment forums, a bus tour of fire-affected areas and ongoing consultation with interested parties.

CANBERRA'S BUSHFIRE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PLAN

The Bushfire Community Partnership Plan (the Partnership Plan) outlines at an operational level how government can best partner with and bring community groups together for project development, delivery of on-ground works and provision of opportunities for volunteering. Community groups are able to apply for funding for which Government is not eligible, and it is important that community and Government work together to ensure priorities are being met in a cohesive way.

The Partnership Plan aims to align projects and initiatives that Government and community groups are working on. This will enable the identification

of opportunities to work together or complement one another where there are similarities between activities. The Partnership Plan also identifies opportunities for fire recovery volunteering and recognises that there are several different groups managing volunteers.

There are existing volunteer groups working in the fire-affected area, including the Kosciuszko Huts Association, Gudgenby Bush Regenerators, National Parks Association, Canberra Bushwalking Club and the Friends of Tidbinbilla who work within the ACT Government ParkCare structure. A range of other community groups also have an interest in fire recovery, including Landcare ACT, Southern ACT Catchment Group, Molonglo Catchment Group, the ACT Rural Landholders' Association, Friends of Grasslands, Greening Australia, Canberra Orchid Society, Waterwatch, Frogwatch, the ACT Conservation Council, Canberra Ornithologist Group, and ACT Wildlife.

The Partnership Plan is the culmination of liaison with these groups as well as Government staff in fire-affected areas to provide meaningful and well-coordinated engagement of volunteers. Activities will commence in Namadgi National Park once the park is reopened and there are plans to undertake activities in the Beard fire area.

More information on how the ACT Government is partnering with community groups is on the ACT Government [Environment website](#).

CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY ORCHID SURVEYS

The Orchid Society of Canberra is a special interest group which makes an important contribution to the conservation and knowledge of the local wild orchid species. The Society recently established a Conservation Group with the intent of undertaking projects in the ACT and region to further the conservation of local orchids. One particular orchid, the Small Snake Orchid (*Diuris subalpina*) occurs in the Orroral Valley and Mt Clear areas which were severely fire affected. Surveys are planned to establish survival, distribution, abundance and resilience of these orchids (and other orchid species) by establishing baseline levels after fire and recording recovery over time. This will include on-foot orchid surveys, and monitoring of grazing animals and other threats via remote sensing cameras. This is an example of a partnership project where community and government work together over the long term to monitor important species and capitalise on the expert knowledge that this special interest group possesses.

Similar examples exist with groups which focus on birds, grasslands, water quality, frogs and other activities which value-add to ACT Government management activities.

CASE STUDY: ORRORAL CAMPGROUND REJUVENATION

Landcare ACT has received grant funding from Landcare Australia Limited to coordinate volunteer engagement in fire recovery, after receiving interest from hundreds of volunteers to participate in fire recovery work. Similarly, the ACT Government's ParkCare program received several hundred expressions of interests in fire recovery volunteering. Volunteer opportunities will centre around assisted natural recovery and threat management rather than large scale rehabilitation such as tree planting. Through the Partnership Plan, appropriate activities are being developed with ACT Parks and Conservation Service staff and the bushfire recovery coordination team.

One project identified as suitable for hosting numerous volunteers is the rejuvenation of the Orroral Campground, which was badly burnt in the fires and will require revegetation of key areas with a range of shrubs and grasses. This opportunity will be extended to all volunteers and will provide a way for different groups to work together in a holistic community effort.

There is significant community interest in bushfire recovery in the ACT and more broadly across Australia. This means that there is a considerable focus on the ACT's bushfire recovery program – a focus that also extends to ongoing bushfire preparedness, land management, conservation, heritage protection, and climate change policies and programs.

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring that the Canberra community has a clear view of the recovery

program and the role they can play in protecting the ACT's natural environment. The ACT Government will use its media and social platforms to inform the community of recovery efforts. This will include providing information on areas of public interest such as park re-opening, the role of Traditional Custodian knowledge and connection to the landscape in land management, and work the Government is doing to respond to climate change in its approach to conservation and bushfire management.







REALISING RECOVERY

There will never be an end point where recovery from the 2020 bushfires is finished. Namadgi National Park and other impacted areas are dynamic landscapes, and bushfire is just one of the threats facing the ACT region's complex ecosystems. The Recovery Plan aims to support the natural recovery of bushfire-affected areas through managing these threats, and through improving our understanding of what recovery looks like for plants, animals and habitats in our region into the future. It will also support a range of other ACT Government management plans and strategies already in place to protect and conserve our natural environment, and to enable the people of the bush capital to enjoy that environment.

Information about the progress of the Recovery Program will be available on the ACT Government Environment website here:

www.environment.act.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-2020.

This page also includes more detail on many of the projects and activities described in this document, including how you can get involved.

