



POLICY NO. 1/03

Fire Trails

1.0 Rationale

- 1.1 Fire trails may serve as a firebreak as well as a physical platform from which fire suppression and mitigation related activities may be undertaken by fire fighting agencies. A knowledge of the location, condition and accessibility of fire trails is essential in the planning and management of suppression operations and mitigation activities. Fire trails can play a critical role in providing rapid response and close access to fires, allowing fire fighting authorities the opportunity to undertake initial attack and early containment of fires. They therefore can provide an opportunity to contain fires often before they escalate into major fires that would otherwise incur significant costs of suppression and potentially significant losses to community and environmental assets.
- 1.2 Fire trails are important resources in the facilitation of prevention and mitigation works. An effective fire trail network increases options available in implementing hazard reduction to protect communities and their social, cultural environmental and economic assets.
- 1.3 Fire trails will have an impact on environmental, social and economic values. These impacts may include:
 - a) Illegal activities such as arson, dumping, trespassing, bush rock/soil or vegetation removal.
 - b) Degradation of native vegetation (including weed invasion) and wildlife habitat.
 - c) Soil erosion and degradation of catchment values including water quality (e.g. siltation) and quantity (e.g. increased surface runoff).
- 1.4 Fire trails can be costly to construct and maintain and hence, their strategic value for fire management purposes needs to be understood by the community and balanced with environmental and other significant values of the area.
- 1.5 Trails constructed for other purposes such as timber production, land management, recreational/tourism activities, access to public and private property, and stock movement may also be important for fire management and should be identified where they are important and recognised as part of the fire trail system.

- 1.6 While fire trails provide a platform for fire mitigation and suppression works, it is recognised that in remote or undeveloped landscapes with rugged topography, fire trail densities may be low. In these areas remote fire fighting techniques typically provide an alternative method of accessing fires.

2.0 Policy

- 2.1 To ensure consistency and suitable standards are applied, Bush Fire Coordinating Committee Guidelines should be adopted by land managers in the identification, construction, maintenance and recording of fire trails. This policy recognises that need to be progressively implemented over time, and consistent with national standards.

3.0 Classification

- 3.1 Fire trails need to be identified and identifiable in a consistent way so as to convey to fire management personnel the condition, purpose and accessibility of the fire trail.
- 3.2 Three categories of fire trails are identified as:
- a) **Primary Fire Trail:** This is a fire trail of strategic importance and/or is a primary feeder route to a network of secondary trails.
 - b) **Secondary Fire Trail:** This is a fire trail that can be used for fire control, suppression and mitigation purposes.
 - c) **Dormant Fire Trail:** This is a fire trail that has been closed but has been identified as suitable for reopening with minimal works.
- 3.3 This trail classification system applies to trails that have been identified in a local bush fire risk management plan as primary or secondary trails and are listed on the register.
- 3.4 The Bush Fire Coordinating Committee's *Guidelines for the Classification of Fire Trails* provides a basis for the standardisation and condition of fire trail identification.

4.0 Construction and Maintenance

- 4.1 Fire trails should be constructed and maintained only to a standard to allow effective bush fire mitigation and suppression activities while ensuring a safer working environment and ameliorating social, economic, and environmental impacts. It is recognised that some land management agencies have developed standards for the construction and maintenance of fire trails; *"Guidelines for the Planning, Construction and Maintenance of tracks (C&LM, 1994)* provides a minimum standard.
- 4.2 Effective management of fire trails requires selection of the best option from a suite that includes: reconstruction to required standard, realignment and relocation from sensitive areas through to closure and rehabilitation.

- 4.3 Where subdivision of land in bush fire prone areas is proposed, construction and maintenance of new fire trails should be considered as part of subdivision release of land to provide strategic protection benefits to the community. Fire trails of this nature should be constructed within the confines of the proposed subdivision development. Reference should be made to “Planning for Bush Fire Protection – A Guide for Land Use Planners, Fire Authorities, Developers and Home Owners” (NSW Rural Fire Service, 2001).
- 4.4 Fire trails should only be constructed or maintained where they provide a clear strategic benefit and the financial and environmental costs do not outweigh the benefits for fire management.

5.0 Fire Trail Registers

- 5.1 Bush Fire Management Committees need to regularly maintain and update a Local Fire Trail Register linked to the Bush Fire Management Plans for its area of responsibility.
- 5.2 The Fire Trail Register should record necessary information for administrative, planning and operational purposes including location, condition and accessibility and should conform to the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee *Guidelines for Fire Trail Register*, when available.

6.0 Funding

- 6.1 Adequate funding is required for a safe and effective fire trail network. Land management agencies are responsible for funding and maintaining fire trails for the proper management and protection of their lands. In the case of new developments the cost of fire trail establishment needs to be met by the developer.
- 6.2 Limited funding is available for fire trail works through the Fire Mitigation Works Fund. The Bush Fire Coordinating Committee *Annual Fire Mitigation Works Fund Policy and Guideline for the Roles and Responsibilities in the Distribution of the Annual Fire Mitigation Works Fund* has been established to regulate the distribution of these funds to Bush Fire Management Committees across New South Wales (refer to Bush Fire Coordinating Committee Policy No. 02.01). Where funding is provided through the Bush Fire Mitigation Fund to construct new fire trails it should be conditional upon the use of Bush Fire Coordinating Committee approved identification signage, when available

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20 February 2003