

What is the Bushfire Mitigation Landscape Strategy?

Fire is a part of our landscape and can't be avoided, but together neighbours, community groups, council, businesses, and schools can have a positive impact on our landscape and reduce the risk of bushfires.

This strategy defines how Council, residents and other agencies can work together to manage these spaces, helping to minimise the negative impacts of bushfires when they do occur.

Adelaide Hills Council would like to thank the community groups including Landcare, CFS volunteers, SA Government agencies, primary producers and fire-affected communities who have contributed to developing this strategy.

We also recognise the need to work collaboratively and meaningfully with our First Nations communities, who have deep knowledge and connection to the land and understanding of how fire can be used as a land management tool. We continue to support cultural burning and fire management programs coordinated by the Department for Environment and Water and the SA National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Why is this important?

The Adelaide Hills Council is located in a high bushfire risk area, and historically has been impacted by a number of major bushfire events. One of the key characteristics of the area is its abundance and diversity of vegetation, with the Mount Lofty Ranges being one of 15 declared biodiversity hotspots in Australia. Coupled with a high population, this creates unique management challenges.

Other complexities in managing vegetation for bushfire risk in the Adelaide Hills include:

- Mixed demographics, including an ageing population and high level of local tourism
- Tensions between balancing bushfire risk mitigation and biodiversity conservation
- Increasing impacts of climate change on fire danger seasons and conditions
- Implications of vegetation clearance around infrastructure and built assets in line with state planning codes and legislation.

Overview of operational plans

The strategy sets out Council's current operational plans and programs relating to fire mitigation, and these plans are included in full as appendices in the closing section.

The plans include:

1. Roadside Reserve Annual Maintenance Program (RRAMP)

The aim of the RRAMP is to reduce vegetation adjacent road corridors to mitigate the impacts of fire and maintain sight lines for road safety. Roads that are included on the RRAMP treatment schedule have been prioritised on the basis of traffic volumes, access and egress, and the connectivity of road systems that provide strategic fuel control breaks in the landscape.

2. Asset Protection Zones program (APZs)

An APZ is a specified area surrounding a built asset or structure where vegetation fuel loads are reduced to inhibit the travel of fire and reduce the effects of heat, flame and ember attack. Council has established APZs as part of its works program which it manages on an annual basis.

3. Fire Track Maintenance Program

Council manages and maintains a strategic network of fire tracks on both public and private land to support the CFS and state government fire management agencies to implement fire suppression operations.

4. Burning on Private Lands Program (BoPL)

AHC supports the delivery of on ground works for the Department for Environment and Water's BoPL program. Strategic sites identified through the Bushfire Management Area Plan, including both private land and Council reserves, are targeted under this program.

5. Weed control for fuel reduction

Council undertakes a number of works programs in order to reduce and prevent heavy fuel loads caused by woody weeds. These include the Bushfire Fuel Reduction Program, which targets high density weed infestations that are responsive to fire; as well as vegetation monitoring and management in conservation reserves to prevent and control weeds in high quality remnant native bushland (generally in conservation reserves).

6. Private property inspections

Prior to fire danger season each year, Council Rangers carry out inspections of private properties across the district and assess fire risk. Properties identified as not being adequately prepared are issued an expiation notice under the SA Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (Section 105F) and are required to take action within 21 days to ensure their property is prepared.

Aims and priorities

The three major aims of this strategy are:

1. To have an informed, empowered and proactive community that understands their rights and responsibilities in effectively contributing to vegetation management.
2. To bring together Council's operational plans and processes related to vegetation management and bushfire mitigation in one place, and to clarify our responsibilities.
3. To ensure Council's approach is effective and expectations of both Council and community are achievable.

There are four strategic priorities underpinning the Bushfire Mitigation Landscape Strategy. Each of these is explored in more detail in the relevant section. Key information relating to each of these has been summarised below, including opportunities for future action.

Priority 1: Strengthening partnerships with other agencies to foster a landscape scale approach to bushfire mitigation

Multiple organisations, including local councils, are responsible for contributing to bushfire mitigation. Council has certain obligations under the following pieces of legislation:

- SA Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005
- SA Native Vegetation Act 1991
- Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
- Landscapes SA Act 2019
- SA Local Government Act 1991

Other organisations involved in this work include the SA Country Fire Service, Department for Environment and Water, Department for Infrastructure and Transport, Native Vegetation Council, Forestry SA, and Landscapes SA.

These organisations are represented on regional Bushfire Management Committees (BMCs), which report in turn to the State Bushfire Coordination Committee (SBMC). Adelaide Hills Council is represented on the Adelaide Mount Lofty Ranges (AMLR) BMC.

Collaboration with neighbouring councils is also achieved through the AMLR Cross-Council Bushfire Action Group (CCBAG), established by AHC in 2023.

Future opportunities:

- Council will work to establish more robust partnerships with other agencies including SA Water, National Parks and Wildlife Service, and the DEW Burning on Private Lands program (BoPL). This includes formalising resourcing arrangements to support DEW to deliver the BoPL, particularly regarding follow up weed control for 8 years following burning.
- AHC will continue its involvement in the Cross-Council Bushfire Action Group (CCBAG) over the coming years, actively identifying opportunities to build on and improve current practises at a wider scale.
- Through the CCBAG, Council will advocate to the AMLR Bushfire Management Committee for more streamlined approaches to landscape scale issues such as fire track mapping and maintenance.
- Council is supporting landholders following bushfire events, by sharing information about managing post-fire regrowth of colonising species such as Golden Wattle *Acacia pycnantha*, as well as expanding current operational programs on public land to manage mass germination following fire.

Priority 2: Improving education and providing clear direction and resources to the community around vegetation management for bushfire risk

Managing bushfire risk is traditionally seen as a 'shared responsibility'; however, there is still some confusion about exactly what this means.

Council owns 5% of land in the AHC, with state government responsible for around 17% and the remainder being privately owned.

A set of guidelines has been developed in consultation with the community which outlines who is responsible for what actions in each of these areas:

- Public parks and reserves (Council and state government land)
- Council managed roadsides and road reserves
- Private property
- Fire tracks

These guidelines reflect the obligations of Council and other agencies under the State Bushfire Management Plan (SBMP). They also link to other AHC plans and strategies as outlined below:

- Roadside Vegetation Management Plan
- Biodiversity Strategy
- Tree Strategy (under development)
- Verge Policy (for consideration)

Future opportunities:

- AHC works closely with the CFS Region 1 and 2 Community Engagement Unit to identify key risk areas for targeted engagement each year. It is intended to support this partnership on an ongoing basis, and where possible contribute time and resources to enhance community education in these areas.
- Council will work with the support of its internal communications team to schedule regular reminders on private property preparation to be shared on AHC social media platforms. This information will include links to low flammability planting guides, as well as tips for verge management and targeted information for managing different land types (agricultural, hobby farms, orchards, bush blocks etc.)
- A detailed audit of our existing fire track network is recommended to determine the tracks of highest strategic value, map the classification of all tracks in the district, and identify opportunities to add or remove tracks as appropriate. Funding was secured through SAFECOM to carry out this work in 2024.
- Council will continue to explore opportunities to inform residents of fire mitigation works happening near them, through the expanded use of technologies including MyLocal Services App and StoryMaps.

- Recognising the need for greater awareness raising of fire risk and preparation across the community, Council staff are looking to produce a series of videos (to be shared on the AHC website and social media) discussing property preparation tips for a variety of land types.
- AHC has a role in actively identifying opportunities to create strategic containment lines within the council area and advocating to DEW for these as appropriate.
- AHC recognises the need for a verge policy to clearly set out the S221 process and where permits for verge maintenance are and are not required by residents. This policy is currently being considered for development.
- Council is rolling out a series of roadside Visual Messaging Signs to inform residents of bushfire season dates and fire danger rating information, as well as encouraging private property preparation.
- AHC is currently undertaking a trial to explore the potential expansion of kerbside green waste collection, to enable residents to better prepare their properties in the lead up to and during the fire season.

Priority 3: Utilising latest fire science approaches to assist in balancing bushfire mitigation with biodiversity conservation

Fire can have significant ecological benefits, and considerable research has been undertaken and is continuing in the field of fire ecology. AHC largely sources information from the following places:

- Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience
- Natural Hazards Research Australia
- Geoscience Australia
- Bureau of Meteorology

Operational works programs are guided by the most up to date science in this area, relating to multiple considerations including:

- Best practise for prescribed burning
- Responding to the impacts of climate change
- Mapping and data collection
- Managing native vegetation post-fire

AHC is also proactive in seeking out examples of best practise elsewhere and applying relevant knowledge and ideas in the work undertaken here. Victoria's [Bushfire Resilience Inc.](#) is one source of information used regularly.

Future opportunities:

- Prescribed burning is generally conducted by state government rather than at Council level, with National Parks & Wildlife Service being the state leader in this area. However it is recommended that AHC work to identify opportunities to collaborate on burning in the future in areas where Council and state government land meet, for example adjacent to National Parks and Conservation Parks. It is also important to expand our support of prescribed burning activities on private land wherever possible, largely through assisting DEW with the BoPL program.
- We do need to consider that ***'the resilience of some biodiversity assets can be improved with the use of ecological burns, at the right scale and timing, however this requires strong evidence that the species, or ecological community, will respond favourably to fire.'***¹⁷ This means we will need to act on the best available information in designing any ecological burning programs in the future.
- AHC would like to explore ways to support DEW in conducting cultural burns where possible. This needs to be done through ongoing and respectful relationships between those involved, and will involve formalized and well-resourced approaches to facilitating the work, which has been crucial to the success of such partnerships in other local government areas.

AHC will consider a range of options to allow us to better adapt to the likelihood of more frequent and intense fire conditions due to climate change. These include:

- Promoting small-scale burns in public lands adjacent to private property where feasible. Landscape scale, inter-agency coordination would be required to ensure their location, size and intervals support ecological outcomes.
- Working in close collaboration with the CFS to report on real-time curing of grasslands to inform declaration of fire danger seasons.

- Mapping and simulation technologies are constantly evolving and offering more detailed insights into fire behaviour and management techniques. AHC Fire Prevention staff will continue to seek out the most appropriate technologies to assist with scheduling mitigation works.
- Council would like to consider how to support and expedite the training and induction of new volunteers involved in bushcare. Training is currently available through the Bush for Life program for a \$55 annual fee.
- Council will actively promote resources from [Bushfire Resilience Inc.](#) in the lead up to fire season each year, as well as seeking and promoting other sources of information to assist residents with property preparation.
- Wherever relevant, AHC resources will reflect the CFS position statement on large trees in relation to bushfire risk, which states that '**mature trees located within 20m of a building, if maintained correctly, do not pose a significant fire risk to the building.**'. It is hoped that this will help assist residents to better manage large trees on their properties.
- AHC is currently developing a template for fire management to be incorporated into existing and future vegetation management plans for Council-owned parks and reserves. This involves measures such as increased weed control, prescribed burning on adjacent land (potentially through the Burning on Private Lands program), as well as creation of buffer zones through planting fire-resistant species around park perimeters.

Priority 4: Continuous improvement of Council's operational plans in line with best practise approaches

The Bushfire Mitigation Landscape Strategy is intended to provide a plan for future opportunities and actions, as well as outlining Council's current practises.

A roadmap of priorities and an implementation plan are therefore included in the final section of the strategy.

The strategy will undergo a major review every 4 years, to coincide with AHC's Strategic Plan. **The strategy will also be reviewed for general updates annually** following the fire danger season, and operational plans will be adjusted as needed.

When a significant fire event has occurred in the AHC area, key staff will also review the strategy to identify any areas that may need further consideration or prioritization.