

How to Balance Bushfire Risk and Biodiversity

The Adelaide Hills are known for its diversity of native plants. This not only makes it an enjoyable place to live but is also important in improving the health of the environment.

Healthy native vegetation has a lot of environmental benefits including:

- Improving air and water quality
- Encouraging pollination
- Absorbing and storing carbon.

However, high levels of vegetation can also pose an increased fire risk when they are not well managed. Here, we have brought together some general tips to help you manage your property.

Replacing weeds with natives

It is estimated that only 10% of the original native vegetation of the Adelaide Hills remains today. Here are some ideas that can help us protect these areas.

- Plant native species (especially grasses) in places where weeds would otherwise grow. Natives are less likely to dry out over summer and can help lower bushfire risk.
- Find out which weeds you have on your property and what you can replace them with.

[Landscapes Hills and Fleurieu](#) has some great resources on their website about high-risk weed species and how to control them.

- If you have blackberries on your property, they may be providing habitat for the endangered southern brown bandicoot. The Department of Energy and Water has published a set of [Bandicoot Habitat Management Guidelines](#) with clear and simple management tips.
- Low-flammability native species can help reduce wind speed, ember attack and heat exposure. You can [download a copy of our guide](#) to find out which plants are best.



Reducing fuel loads

Fuel levels are just one factor impacting fire behaviour and intensity. Others include weather conditions, terrain, and moisture levels both in the air and in vegetation.

We can't remove bushfire risk completely, but we can take steps to manage fuel loads, including:

- Removing dead branches and leaves. Living fuel has a lot more moisture than dead fuel, so it doesn't burn as easily.
- Pruning back tree limbs if they overhang your home; otherwise leave them in place. Large trees provide shade and help keep the ground moist, and during a fire they can help reduce impacts of wind and embers.

This is reflected in the [CFS position statement](#) on mature trees:

“Mature trees located within 20m of a building, if maintained correctly, do not pose a significant fire risk to a building.”

- Leave gaps between small trees and shrubs when you're planting. This can help slow the spread of fire. It's also important to remove leaf litter, sticks and twigs on the ground.
- Remove bark where it is likely to lift off trees and travel in the wind. Also make sure smaller shrubs are planted further away from larger trees, to reduce the chance of fire moving rapidly into the canopy (treetops).

Rural and agricultural land

Different techniques can be used for different land uses. For example, grazing stock in a mosaic pattern may be an effective strategy on agricultural land.

Council has produced a series of [videos with tips on rural land management](#).

Landscapes Hills and Fleurieu has extensive information on [managing watercourses to reduce bushfire risk](#).

Prescribed burning

- Not all fires are damaging to the landscape; in fact, fires that are small and occur in cooler conditions can help vegetation regenerate and stay healthy. Traditional owners often call this the right fire at the right time.
- **Prescribed burning** is the controlled use of fire in low-risk conditions. Ecological burning and hazard reduction burns are two examples of this. The Department for Environment and Water carries out prescribed burns on private property under the [Burning on Private Lands program- find out more online](#).
- Weeds will often multiply after a fire, so it's important to follow up weed control for at least eight years after a prescribed burn. This helps maintain the health of the ecosystem and maintain low fuel loads.

Important to know

Before pruning or removing trees, check the [Plan SA website](#). Some trees are protected under planning regulations.

In some cases, clearance of native vegetation may require approval under the SA Native Vegetation Act 1991. [Visit the CFS website](#).

