

CONVENOR'S ADDRESS TO FRIENDS OF THE ARANDA BUSHLAND

AGM FEB 17th 2003

Bushfire history and risks for Aranda

In the present situation , when we have had three days last month of extreme fire danger and high fire alerts for our suburb, it may be of interest to our members for me to review the issue of bushfire and fire prevention for our area.

We are in the area which is designated Fire Management Unit 1, in the ACT Bushfire Management Plan , which includes Black Mountain, Bruce and O'Connor Ridges and Aranda Bushland. Our area of bushland is substantially dry forest, with houses on some sides and major roads on others. Adjoining it are grasslands, which also get tinder-dry in summer. We can expect to get fires, the questions are how many, where and how hot?

The history of fires in our area is very informative. In the last 25 years there were 74 recorded wildfires, with the worst year 1994-95 summer having 40 fires, all lit by arsonists or other human ignition.

In the Aranda bushland itself we had large areas burnt by wildfires in 1997/8; 1986/7; and 1995. Small areas were burnt in 1889/90 ; 1990/91; 1995 and 2001. The location of these fires is also interesting. They are on the map , Bindubi st edge, Caswell Drive edge and the suburban edge along Araba St to Galali Place. Only one small lit fire in the bush itself, at Christmas 2001.

All these fires appear to be of accidental human origin or arson, no running fires from other areas.

This means the big risk is arson in our area-and it is a risk that will not go away. In the ACT overall arson has doubled roughly every decade.

The fire management plan also shows a risk from fire running from the Molongolo Valley to Aranda, which is a real risk to us this year having seen it twice in 14 months. In both fires we were saved by the wind direction
I expect the risk from there is lessened now, as most of the pine trees are burnt!

The ACT has a thorough fire fuel management plan, which includes suburb by suburb fire safety practices.

For Aranda we have a prescribed burning plan, which covers the whole Aranda bushland to the edge of the suburb.

The map shows the plan.

The largest prescribed burn was in 1995, which was under the strategic fire management part of the plan. This is when the large area along Bindubi St was burnt. There were fire trucks, rangers and ANU students present. The last burn under this plan was May 1999, which is the blue hatched area on the map. This burn was done for asset protection, that is to save houses from fire coming up the ridge. It is done when the fire fuel reaches about 4-12 tonnes /hectare, and is likely to be needed every 4-8 years depending on the rainfall.

There is also a much more extensive strategic burn area burn on the schedule, which covers all the northern end of the bushland from the power lines to the suburb edge. This is not to be done more frequently than every 8 years and is done when the fuel load exceeds 15 t/h. It does not necessarily cover all the area each time, just the high fuel load or high risk areas.

The fuel load may not reach this ever, or only in parts, then the part to be burnt can be limited. It can also be mosaic burnt, rather than a huge fire.

Our own efforts in clearing weeds, shrubs and fire risk plants along the edge of the suburb in winter 2000/01 and the CNP efforts in 2002 much reduced the Aranda hazard this year. However we can expect controlled burns as part of the ongoing safety requirements of our suburb.

I expect that there will be much debate about revision of the fire plan, in the light of what happened this year. We can expect more high temperatures and drought from global warming, rather than less, so fire safety will need more concerted attention in future.

Thank you, I expect that there will be a good deal of discussion on this issue.

Thank members, cttee wish all well for 2003

Mary Falconer