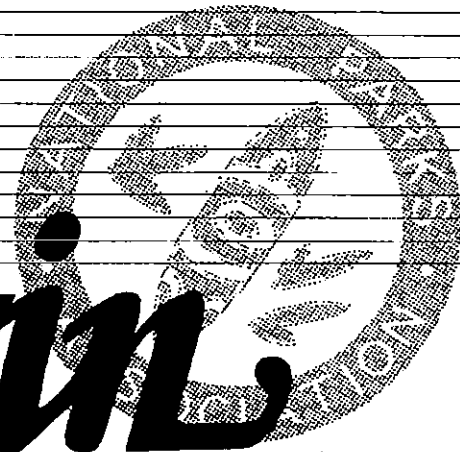


NPA Bulletin



Extra Namadgi Bushfire
issue, February 2003

NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION (ACT) INCORPORATED

Editorial

Bushfire aftermath – NPA's role

At a time when the devastating effects of the fires in the region are being recognised and with the knowledge that threats from continuing fires and new outbreaks remain, our thoughts go out to those who have suffered from the fires and to those who have done so much to control the outbreaks. The damage in Namadgi is yet to be assessed but its huge extent and enormous consequences are already apparent. What is the association's role in the current situation?

As may be expected in the train of such a tragedy, there have been many criticisms of national park operations and questioning of the concepts underpinning the establishment of national parks. Premature though these judgments may be, they are gaining some prominence. One task of supporters of national parks will be to uphold the long-term values of national parks and bring influence to ensure that the press of current difficulties does not distort the achievement of balanced decisions to maintain these values. In this context the articles reproduced overleaf provide some food for thought.

More immediately, members of this association are anxious to provide what assistance they can to park management in undertaking on-the-ground tasks which will facilitate the rehabilitation of the park. We think back to the work done by NPA members after the 1983 fires in the regeneration of areas damaged by the construction of fire-fighting access tracks. The association has already offered this type of support to Environment ACT and, as set out on page 4, now seeks to build up a group of members able to put this into effect.

The NPA should be an important community voice in the considerations and negotiations which will be undertaken in determining the future course to be followed for Namadgi, other reserves and in related issues. This role will be demanding of both effort and expertise so will need the broad involvement of members. A move in this direction has already been taken by the association in putting itself forward for membership of the Community and Expert Reference Group which is being formed to work closely with the Canberra Bushfire Recovery Taskforce.

The occurrence of the fires in Namadgi has, if anything, added to the relevance and importance of the current review of the Namadgi Plan of Management (POM). Contributing to this review has been a major preoccupation of the NPA over past months but the need for a sound POM to underpin rehabilitation processes will add to the significance of the strategies incorporated in it and hence to the importance of the association's input to the review.

Carrying through the issues raised in the preceding paragraphs whilst continuing with our other activities will put greater demands on members. It also provides opportunities for other members of the Canberra community to join the association and so play a part in assuring a sound future for Namadgi National Park.

Syd Comfort

Widespread losses

The loss of natural and cultural assets in the ACT parks has been extensive and at the time of going to press the full extent could not be ascertained. The following information has been obtained from the Kosciusko Huts Association web site and other sources.

In Namadgi, the firestorm was widespread across the majority of the park. The fires were also rampant around Tidbinbilla, where the nature park has been scorched. Nil Desperandum, the animal breeding houses, the animal enclosures, all the staff houses, the education centre and the old depot have been destroyed. Most of the animals have been killed. The Visitor's Centre remains.

Many parks staff lost their homes and possessions, including Brett MacNamara, Alan Bendall at Bendora, and Amanda Carey at Glendale.

The fire singed the Ginnini Wetlands but hopes are high for survival of the adult corroboree frogs in the sphagnum moss (not in the forest but breeding still in the wet moss at this time).

Canopy fires occurred, especially in the Brindabellas, and damage is severe and will take a long time to recover. Lost were sheds and hut at Bushfold Flats and lots of fencing, barriers and bridges throughout the Park.

Franklin Chalet, the oldest ski club building in Australia, was destroyed despite 200m containment lines and backburning. Brett managed to rescue cultural items from the Franklin Chalet, including Reg Alder's hand made skis.

Most huts in the ACT forests including Lees Camp, Condor Creek and Blue Range were also destroyed.

The Cotter Depot office has gone, likewise the bridge over the Cotter and the Cotter pub. On the positive side, the Cotter Hut is still standing, the Gudgenby area is not too badly burnt, the camping ground is still green according to Sharon Lane. Brett confirmed that the Boboyan Pines have burnt. Pryors Hut and arboretum are still standing.

It is believed that this 1-in-a-100 year firestorm was started on January 8 when three fires were started by lightning strikes at Stockyard Spur, Bendora Bushrangers Creek and MacIntyres Hut.

Gudgenby bush regeneration

The position at mid-day January 28 was that most of the Gudgenby regeneration area had escaped the fire but that fires in surrounding areas present some threat. Fifteen spot fires were seen in the regeneration area and all were extinguished. The taller regeneration area appears to be in good shape but the Olympic landcare site has been badly damaged. The slash from earlier felling has been dozed and used as a back-burn. Some of the standing pines have been burned. The group's trailer which contains tools and equipment was stored at the Glendale Parks Depot and although the depot is at this stage substantially intact the condition of the trailer is not known. The work party set down for Saturday, February 8 has been cancelled. A newsletter for group members should be ready this week. Eleanor Stodart, phone 6281 5004 is the contact.

Gudgenby and Orroral Valleys

The Gudgenby homestead and the adjacent ready-cut house are safe and the surrounding area appears fairly safe. Orroral homestead has not been burnt. It has been noted that the floors of both valleys which are grassed, have not been burnt.

Park staff

Namadgi staff have had a long and trying battle with the fires and have earned our heartfelt thanks. As far as is known, they have escaped injury but most of those living in the park and in Tidbinbilla have lost their homes, including Brett MacNamara, Amanda Carey and Alan Bendall. Our sympathy goes out to these people and their families. Perhaps our association could help them in some way.

MacIntyres Hut

MacIntyres Hut to the west of Mount Coree has been very much in the news as a reference point in the fire areas in the Brindabella National Park. Reg Alder reports that the hut is not marked on the topographical maps but is located on the Bobbys Plains map at grid reference 581 959.

Namadgi National Park bushfire recovery process

In response to the bushfires which had been burning in Namadgi following lightning strikes on January 8 Environment ACT had developed a bushfire recovery process and by January 17 had drafted an organisation plan to progress this. The aim of this was to establish a framework of management processes and conservation measures that should be implemented in the wake of the January 2003 bushfires to ensure the values of Namadgi National Park are conserved.

The process identified three objectives. These are :

- rectify existing environmental disturbance arising from the fire;
- prevent further environmental disturbance; and
- develop opportunities.

An executive, a review committee and specialist planning groups were identified and positions within these proposed.

Since this work was done the bushfires have intensified and the scale of damage has escalated. At the time of writing the status of these proposals is not known. Nevertheless, they indicate a direction which recovery planning may follow.

Patience and planning needed for park recovery

Access to large parts of the Kosciuszko National Park could be denied for years and it may be months before some of the more accessible areas are reopened to the public. Large numbers of animals, both native and introduced, will have perished, and loss of vegetation means loss of food sources in many areas. Survivors will have a difficult time and some still might not make it. Competition for food in less damaged areas will be heightened. Wild horses could be wiped out from the north of the park.

In an article by John Ellicott in *The Australian* of January 28, director of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service in the southern region, Tony Fleming, is quoted as saying the test for many animals will be the winter, whether there is enough food and whether they can breed. Among those under threat is the corroboree frog – there were only 150 of them between Cabramurra and Khancoban before the fires hit.

According to the article, the director feels some confidence regarding eventual rehabilitation because the fire burned in a mosaic pattern, with untouched areas that can become important “staging areas” for animals.

The First Assistant Secretary, Environment Australia, Bruce Leaver, is quoted in the same article as saying that oversimplification of the use of fire for hazard reduction in the KNP could have disastrous long-term effects.

In a study included in the Independent Scientific Committee (ISC) report evaluating KNP’s flora, fauna and cultural values, Bruce Leaver says increased hazard reduction in the park by 4000ha blocks from the 1950s to the 1970s over nearly 80 per cent of the park, did very little to control park fuel loads and greatly damaged forest and woodland vegetation.

In the same ISC report, environmental consultant Lorraine Cairnes says a lot of the plants are very slow growing and increased hazard reduction would only destroy the biodiversity. She is quoted in the article as saying that visitors coming back into the wrong places too soon will cause irreversible damage.

The director of the NPWS, Brian Gilligan, quotes history and statistics to support his argument that fire is a natural feature of national parks and that suggestions for increased hazard reduction burning in the parks is based less on science than ideology and vested interest.

According to an article by Mike Secombe in the weekend *Sydney Morning Herald* of 25-26 January, Mr Gilligan noted that 22 per cent of fires affecting national parks actually burned into them from private property, and only 9 per cent burned out of parks.

The article continues: “This land has burnt, historically, regardless of who owned it and who was managing it,” Gilligan says. “Three-and-a-half million hectares of south-eastern Australia burnt in 1951-52 and 1.5 million ha of that was state forest – working forest. More than a million hectares of state forest burned in 1967-68. NPWS didn’t even exist then.

“Some people say grazing is the answer. But look at the 1939 fires. There had been 100 years of grazing in the high country round Kosciuszko. You had up to 200 000 sheep and 17 000 cattle in the area that is now national park. They didn’t stop the fires roaring through.

“People say fires are worse since we’ve got all these national parks. But the figures don’t stack up in terms of areas burnt, number of properties lost, lives lost.

“It happens every 30 years or so, cyclically where we have a prolonged drought and bad fire weather. They came together in 1901 and we had a massive wildfire season. They came together in 1927, 1939, 1951-52, ’67-’68 and so on.”

The cause of the 2002-03 fires was lightning, from a line of drystorms which swept across south-east Australia.

Graeme Wicks

Notices

Members help sought

The Committee would appreciate the assistance of members in two particular areas. It is clear that the association will need to respond to many issues affecting Namadgi and related matters arising from the current situation. In order that this response reflects members' views the committee would like members to pass on their ideas and suggestions and, of course, offers of assistance in developing the NPA's responses.

So as to be in a position to arrange work parties when the time for these arrives, the Committee is compiling a list of members willing to assist in Namadgi (or other reserves). Members able to volunteer are asked to register their interest.

Park management has particularly asked NPA to develop a register of names and skill base (experience with seed collection and dissemination, soil conservation, etc).

Response to both of these requests may be made through the office phone or email, through any committee member or through Vice President Kevin McCue, phone 6251 1291 or email asc@netspeed.com.au

Fire forum

This is to be held at the ANU 19/20th February
Robertson Lecture Theatre
Research School of Biological Sciences
Building #46.
Starts 10.00am on 19th.

Namadgi NP Plan of Management public meeting

Organised by Environment ACT, this meeting is open to the public without reservations, but a check should be made to confirm in case of postponement.

Hayden Centre
Manuka
5/6th February, 5.00 to 7.30pm.

Association outings program

Outings Convenor David Large is working on arrangements for an outings program meeting, details of which he will soon be circulating. **Members will need to check scheduled walks with leaders.**

NPA February general meeting, Thursday February 20

Roger Farrow has agreed to postpone his scheduled talk because Environment ACT has kindly offered one of their staff to address the association on the Namadgi fires, their impact and plans for recovery. A meeting not to be missed, it will be held at 8.00pm in **O'Connor Uniting Church hall, 56 Scrivener Street, O'Connor.**

NPA Bulletin

This **Extra Namadgi bushfire issue** has been prepared on January 28 to pass on to members available information relating to the fires in Namadgi. The next regular issue will be in March 2003.

There should be space in the *March Bulletin* for items relating to the fires in Namadgi provided the copy reaches me very, very soon.

Syd Comfort, ph 6286 2578.

NPA contacts

Office

Phone/Fax: (02) 6282 5813
Email: npaact@bigpond.com
Address: PO Box 1940, Woden ACT 2606

Office-bearers

Vice-president Kevin McCue 6251 1291 (h)
email: asc@netspeed.com.au
Treasurer Steven Forst 6251 6817(h),
6219 5326(w)

Committee members

Chris Emery 6249 7604 (h)
Rod Griffiths 6288 6988 (h)
David Large 6291 4830 (h)
Lyndall Young 6286 3277 (h)

Immediate Past President

Clive Hurlstone 6288 7592 (h)
040 778 3422 (mob)

This *Bulletin* was produced by the NPA *Bulletin* Working Group.

Printed by Copy-Qik, Canberra, ACT.

ISSN 0727-8837

