

Thank you

A Message from SLOPES

"SLOPES would like to sincerely thank all those NPWS staff, volunteers, fire-fighters and friends who gave of their time and effort to help save our 88 lodges in the Snowfields during the fires. The attachment of SLOPES members to their lodges is very deep and personal, and in some funny areas deeper than perhaps to our homes. We all move homes from time to time, memories fade, but to many of us our lodges are a permanent part of our lives as families and with friends, and we hope to pass these feelings on to future generations.

We know that firefighting is tricky, dangerous and uncomfortable, and just want to say THANKS".

E-mail from Graeme Anderson dated 14/2/03.

Thank you from Selwyn Snowfields

"With the passing of the bushfire crisis in Kosciuszko National Park, the management of Selwyn Snowfields would like to sincerely thank the efforts of a number of fire fighting agencies and their team members. These agencies include the NPWS and its officers, the dedicated volunteers of the Rural Fire Service and the NSW Fire Brigades to name a few.

In excess of 40 fire fighting personnel were deployed at Selwyn Snowfields on Friday 17, Saturday 18 and Sunday 19 January.

The main fire fronts passed directly to the south and north of Selwyn Snowfields on Friday afternoon. The front that passed to the south was described as one of the biggest ever seen by some of the firefighters, with the fire-ball soaring hundreds of metres into the sky. An easing of the strong and fluky winds of daytime Friday permitted the establishment of firebreaks and the commencement of backburning operations in and around Selwyn Snowfields. These dedicated individuals worked tirelessly right through the Friday night into Saturday afternoon. Mopping up operations were still occurring on Sunday.

Thanks to the efforts of these dedicated teams we are very grateful to announce that ALL assets at Selwyn Snowfields have been saved".

Facsimile from Tim Corkhill dated 19/2/03.

Update from Perisher Blue Pty Ltd

"It appears that Perisher Blue actually received the greatest amount of fire damage than any other NSW resort and recent reconnaissance of damage detection estimated that approximately 35% of the ski area management units have been affected by fire. The greatest amount occurring within Guthega and Blue Cow ski areas along with damage to part of the Guthega Ski Centre's roof, ceiling and walls. Some minor damage to lift electric cabling also resulted from the fires, however no towers, haul ropes or lift terminals have been affected.

Assistant Mountain Manager – Barry Turel says "We do not expect any real impact from the fire on our winter operations except to say that Perisher Blue may have more black runs than any other resort – at least for the 2003 season".

Information downloaded from Perisher Blue Website.



Resort Roundup

special fire edition

March 2003



overview **Kosciuszko**

Perisher Range Resorts

The Perisher Range Resorts (Perisher Valley, Smiggin Holes, Blue Cow and Guthega) were attacked by three fires.

The first fire, started by spot overs, was on the eastern side of Smiggin Holes near Rennix Gap. Extensive backburning along the Link Road assisted in containing this fire and protecting Resort assets.

The second fire came from Porcupine Walking Track and attacked the southern side of Perisher. Joint work by NPWS, RFS, NSW Fire Brigade and Perisher Blue Pty Ltd with containment lines and backburning over several days assisted in containing this fire to the southern side of Kosciuszko Road and the resort assets. This fire eventually joined with the fire from Rennix Gap.

The third fire initiated from the northern side of Guthega Dam and rapidly spread throughout Guthega and eventually spotted to Blue Cow and Ridge Chair area. Due to its location this fire flared up significantly on high wind days resulting in it attacking Guthega twice. This fire was the most destructive of the three with damage occurring to the Nordic Shelter at Guthega Ski Centre, the pygmy possum habitat at Blue Cow and some skiing infrastructure. This fire eventually spotted to Mt Piper where it continued to be a nuisance until recent rains and ground attacks brought it under control. Works on the Water Supply Upgrade and Sewerage Augmentation continued throughout these fires but progress was affected. It is anticipated that the majority of these works will still be completed prior to Winter 2003.

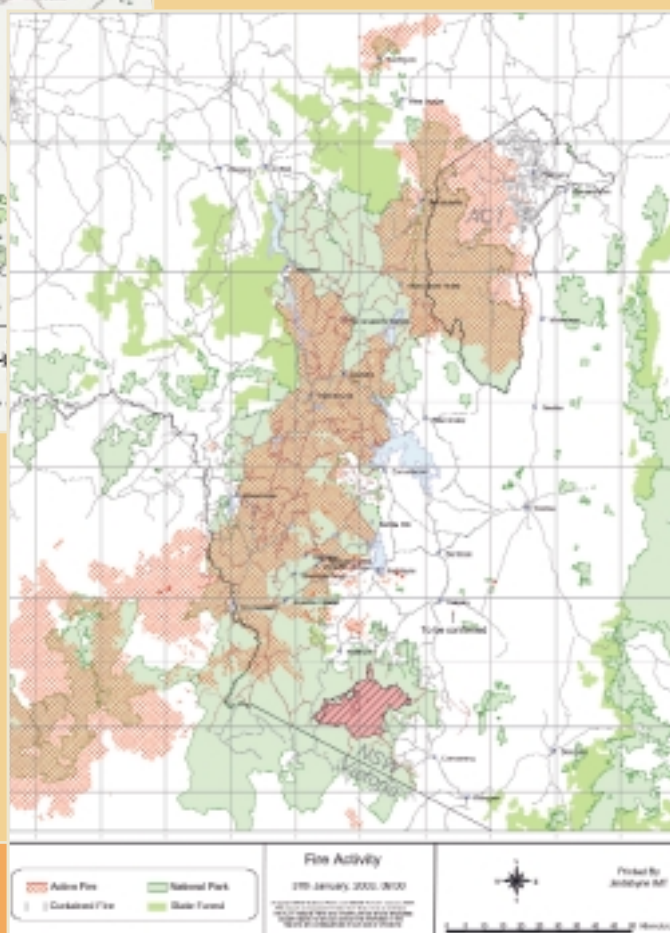
The concrete roads program has been delayed as a result of the fires. The contractor has left the site and will return in March to finish the Matterhorn Road works. The full program of works is expected to be completed as scheduled.

Fires also went through the Sawpit Creek area resulting in significant damage to infrastructure including Sawpit Sewage Treatment Plant, Bald Mountain Pumping Station and Kosciuszko Mountain Retreat store. Various minor water supply infrastructure. NPWS is busy rectifying these assets in an attempt to have them ready for winter 2003.



Above: lightning strike ignition points, 10 January 2003.

Right: Spread of fire within 3 weeks, 31 January 2003.



Above: lightning strike ignition points, 10 January 2003.

Right: Spread of fire within 3 weeks, 31 January 2003.

National Park fires



Summit Quad, Blue Cow, Perisher Blue Ski Resort.

Skitube

A risk assessment is currently being carried out in relation to fire damaged trees in and around the permanent way between Thredbo River and Portal One. Any tree removal or trimming then requires formal approval from the NPWS. In addition, regular train maintenance has been set back at least three weeks due to the fires and there are other abnormal servicing requirements that are being scheduled this summer. The Skitube is not expected to reopen before mid to late March 2003. The decision to reopen will be periodically reviewed and will be on a weekly basis from early March. A further decision will be made in or about mid to late March.

Thredbo

Whilst the fires burnt across large areas along the Thredbo Valley, no buildings or other major infrastructure was lost within Thredbo Village. Fires did burn sections along the Dead Horse Gap and Riverside Walking tracks on the western side of the village, but most impact was associated with the construction of fire containment lines, particularly around the

Crackenback Ridge precinct. Part of the fire protection strategy included mineral-earth containment lines linking the Village Trail into the Golf Course, vegetation clearing around lodges and backburning from established control lines. In fact, 2 main backburning operations were conducted to the west of the village. The first backburn implemented was behind and to the west of Riverside Cabins, and the second backburn included areas to the west of the upper and lower Funnelweb ski run, and the golf course. Snowmaking facilities were also utilised in conducting the backburning operation along the upper areas of the mountain.

Facts and figures

- Total NSW areas affected by fire: 597,000 hectares.
- Total NSW national parks affected by fire: 502,400 hectares.
- Kosciuszko National Park affected by fire: 468,000 hectares.
- Percentage of KNP affected by fire: 68%.
- NSW State Forest, crown & other land affected by fire: 12,600 hectares.
- Total ACT area affected by fire: 156,600 hectares.
- Total Victoria area affected by fire: 1.1 million hectares.

Southern Area

- 17 – 20 December 2002 approximately 20 fires resulted from lightning.
- 8 January 2003 – lightning strikes ignited 45 fires in KNP.
- 17 January 2003 – many of the fires had joined by this stage and after this day 14 fires continued to burn.

Who was involved

Rural Fire Service, local councils, NSW Fire Brigades, National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests NSW, Queensland Fire Brigades, Snowy Hydro, Transgrid, Country Energy, Roads and Traffic Authority, Police and Ambulance, State Emergency Service, Dept of Community Services, NSW Health, NSW Tourism, Country Fire Authority (Victoria), Dept of Sustainability and Environment (Victoria), Bureau of Meteorology, Dept of Public Works and Services, Rural Lands, Protection Board, Volunteer Rescue



View from East Jir

Association of NSW, The South Coast, Bega Bushwalkers, K9 Search and Rescue (Victoria), Red Cross, Salvation Army.



Resources

- At the peak of fire fighting 1600 personnel were deployed to fight fires in the Snowy Mountains.
- 3.5 million litres of mixed foam dumped on fires by aircraft.
- 50,000 litres of retardant dumped on fires by aircraft.
- 1.4 million litres of water dumped on fires by aircraft.
- 40 aircraft used in fire fighting activities at any one time.
- 36 bulldozers.



ndabyne to the mountains, February 2003

Public Information

- 20,000 calls to 1800 phone number.
- 60 radio community service announcements.
- 17 public meetings – 3,000 participants.
- Information delivered to 21,000 households through mail.
- 68 fire fact summaries.
- Radio interviews.
- 20 Media Releases.
- NPWS and RFS websites.

Mountain Pygmy-possum and other small mammals

During the course of the recent wildfires, one of the aspects in preparing planning and operation strategies was to identify key environmental assets that were at threat from the progressive fire fronts. Whilst the protection of life and property was always a primary objective, there was opportunity to focus on protecting some threatened species. With approximately 500 breeding pairs of Mountain Pygmy-possum scattered in various localities across the alpine and high-sub-alpine areas, this task was difficult, particularly given the conflagrated nature of the fire events. In one perspective, the scattered distribution of Mountain Pygmy-possum habitat has protected most animals from being directly impacted by fire. Unfortunately one of the fires resulted in most of the habitat on Mt. Blue Cow being burned. Subsequent monitoring identified 3 animals still present from a population of 10 animals surveyed prior to the fires. However, in response to the survival of the animals at Mt. Blue Cow, and the pressure that displaced foxes and cats were having on other Mountain Pygmy-possum areas, a concerted and widespread fox baiting and cat-trapping program was commenced. Furthermore, given the slow growing nature of some of the shrubs growing around and over the boulder-fields at Mt. Blue Cow, an extended weed spraying program was conducted that targeted environmental weeds in addition to Viper's Bugloss, St. John's Wort and Milfoil, to help reduce competition to native plants. Some smaller Mountain Pygmy-possum habitat areas were also burnt. These areas will be subjected to a surveying

program in March to determine the impact of these fires.

Whilst fire is a natural part of the environment, the extent and magnitude of the recent wildfires will place an enormous constraint on the recovery of certain species and population of animals. Ski resort areas, particularly Thredbo, Charlottes Pass and those in the Perisher Range, are part of a large and relatively fire-free 'island' that connects to the alpine zone. Therefore these areas will become important sources for re-colonising adjacent burnt communities as the vegetation, and hence habitat, recovers from fire. Whilst the fox and cat abatement program is important to help the recovery of small mammals, residents, managers and lodge visitors can also help by refraining from using poison baits and snap-traps to target small mammals in buildings. If there is a problem, then Elliot traps (live traps) can be used and the animals relocated.



Kyilla Lodge, Guthega.

Continued from inside...

Feral animals after fires

The NSW NPWS will take advantage of the opportunities offered by the recent bushfires for a focused attack on certain feral animals within Kosciuszko National Park.

NPWS Regional Manager, Dave Darlington has stated that the recent fires may have pushed many ferals out of their comfort zone and into areas where there is little cover.

"Anecdotal evidence over the past fortnight suggests that many wild dogs and foxes have survived the fires but have lost the cover of the forest and quite likely much of their food resources. This means many may have moved out into open farm country where they may be a little more desperate and therefore more susceptible to trapping".

"While we continue fire fighting operations our dog trappers and contract trapper will return to their primary job of hunting wild dogs this week. The first step will be assessing the situation, especially after talking to local landholders, who are in the best position to tell us what they've seen since the fires passed through. Then they can begin targeting dogs".

"Similarly we have begun a fox baiting program and a cat trapping program in and around the Alpine area, in the Perisher Valley and along the Kosciuszko Road".

Mr Darlington said there was also the opportunity to reduce pig numbers in the park given that much of the vegetation cover had been removed by the fires and they would be easier to spot from the air. "First chance we get we will have helicopters in the air to hunt and remove pigs through aerial culling. I expect this to happen within a few weeks before real regrowth starts to occur".



Sponars Chalet

"As for wild horses, we know many of them have survived as they have been seen in an unburnt area in the Pilot wilderness in the south as well as Long Plain in the north of the park. We will be sticking to the intent of the original wild horse management plan, developed in consultation with the community, which called for a reduction of their number in the Alpine area through trapping. The Wild Horse Steering Committee will meet shortly to consider the issues and options," Mr Darlington said.

Aboriginal sites

Future rehabilitation works for aboriginal sites will include Aboriginal cultural heritage assessments (to be carried out by a qualified archaeologist, NPWS Southern Aboriginal Heritage Unit staff involvement and Aboriginal Community participation). All proposed works will be mapped and strategies will be put in place to undertake appropriate rehabilitation works. All works will be inspected and appropriate conditions set down during works, including Aboriginal staff/community participation and monitoring.

Inspection and assessment of the condition of all known recorded Aboriginal sites across the park will be included in rehabilitation works. Particular attention will be made to scarred trees and art sites.

Northern Plain fire front February 2003



other resort matters

Benefits of rainwater reuse in ski resorts

An investigation into the feasibility of rainwater reuse from ski resort buildings within the Kosciuszko National Park has recently been completed for the NPWS Resort Division.

Acting Manager, Simon Lyas, said that the study is an important step taken towards achieving sustainability within Kosciuszko National Park.

"Studies undertaken in other areas of NSW have shown that the use of rainwater tanks in urban areas can provide many environmental and economic benefits," Mr Lyas said. "These benefits include easing the pressure on our water resources and reducing the quantities and velocities of stormwater discharging to local waterways" he added. "This in turn reduces the amount of pollution being transported to our waterways, prevents stream erosion and reduces local flooding".

This feasibility study has investigated the installation of a rainwater tank with an

innovative dual water supply technique on three separate development scenarios in the Perisher Valley. "This technique ensures that the tank automatically draws from the mains water supply when the water levels in the tank are low, thus ensuring a constant supply of water from the tank to the building is maintained" Mr Lyas explained. The three scenarios investigated were the proposed Police and Emergency Services building and NPWS office, and an existing development being a "typical" 30 bed lodge.

"The results from the study are very promising, with a tank as small as 10,000 litres providing considerable reductions in mains water demand and stormwater discharge" Mr Lyas said. "Such a system on the "typical" lodge could provide an annual saving on the mains water supply of over 400,000 litres. This accounts for a reduction in mains water demand of about 50% and stormwater runoff of about 70%" he added.

NPWS are now planning on constructing such a system on an existing lodge in Perisher

Valley as a demonstration project. "This will allow us to undertake monitoring of the system to verify the findings of the study, as well as to determine the most appropriate design and construction techniques to overcome issues associated with rainwater collection, storage and reuse in a snow and ice environment" Mr Lyas said.

"The National Parks and Wildlife Service is very excited about the results of this study and the proposed demonstration project" Mr Lyas added. "With the current proposals for expansion of the Perisher Valley resorts, the reuse of rainwater can hopefully ensure that future water needs are met, whilst also reducing the environmental impacts of development and ensuring environmental flows within streams are maintained".

Anyone wanting a copy of the study or more information on the demonstration project can contact NPWS Project Administration Manager Amy Roberts on (02) 6450 5615 or Project Coordinator Harvey Lane on (02) 6450 5147.

a rewarding experience EMS Lodge Workbook

Thank you to the 35% of the Perisher Range Resort lodges who have sent in completed reporting sheets for last winter.

Going through the Workbook and completing the reporting sheets can be a rewarding experience. Feedback received from one of the lodges is as follows:-

"I applaud the work that has gone into the development of the Environmental Management System and wholeheartedly support the process. I was pleased to note as I completed

the workbook that our club ... was well on its way to meeting the objectives set out in the Environmental Management Program, in particular our humble attempts to eradicate noxious grasses; our liaison with other lodges to raise the awareness of community cooperation; our water management program with low volume showers; our non use of dangerous chemicals and our encouragement of our members to reduce their power usage, 'more clothes less heaters'."

If your lodge is yet to complete the reporting sheets, help is at hand. Megan Bennett, the newly appointed NPWS Environmental Management Officer, is available to answer any questions you may have about the Perisher Range Resorts EMS or the Lodge Workbook. Please don't hesitate to contact Megan on (02) 6450 5607.