

Property bushfire preparation and native vegetation management

Case Study 1



Wildfire Management Overlay



Summary

It is possible to prepare a property for bushfire and look after native vegetation.

With support from the Shire of Yarra Ranges and CFA, a Yarra Junction landholder has been able to plan both property bushfire preparation and native vegetation management.

The challenges

To get a planning permit to build a house, the owner had to demonstrate how their proposal would comply with bushfire safety and native vegetation legislation.

With a passion for native plants and animals, this landholder wanted to manage bushfire risk in a way that would limit impacts on the property's native vegetation.

Choosing good ways to do this requires knowledge of bushfire preparedness and native vegetation.

The approach

Before developing a planning permit application, the owner met on site with CFA and Shire of Yarra Ranges staff.

The meeting allowed everyone to discuss both bushfire preparedness and native vegetation issues, and to identify possible design solutions.

"Design solutions quickly suggest themselves when bushfire safety and native vegetation personnel, and the owner get together on site"

– Shire of Yarra Ranges Environment Officer.

The landholder was then able to develop a proposal to reconcile bushfire preparation and conservation objectives.

The most important step was to choose a house site that would reduce both bushfire risks and impacts on native vegetation.

For a number of years the front of the block had been regularly slashed. This had kept fuel hazards relatively low and had resulted in a high diversity of native plants.

Native wildflowers like the hyacinth orchid can thrive in the fuel modified area



Slashed area that will provide a fuel modified area



On this particular site, a careful slashing regime and selective removal of a few shrubs will provide a fuel modified area and keep a high level of ground plant diversity. (NB. Appropriate vegetation management techniques are generally site specific).

Locating the house at the front of the block will also avoid a long driveway. This will provide good access for emergency vehicles and reduce the amount of vegetation removal.

The proposed house is based on Australian Standard 3959 Building in Bushfire Prone Areas. This includes consideration of windows and cladding. Careful house design also means that most of the mature trees can be kept.

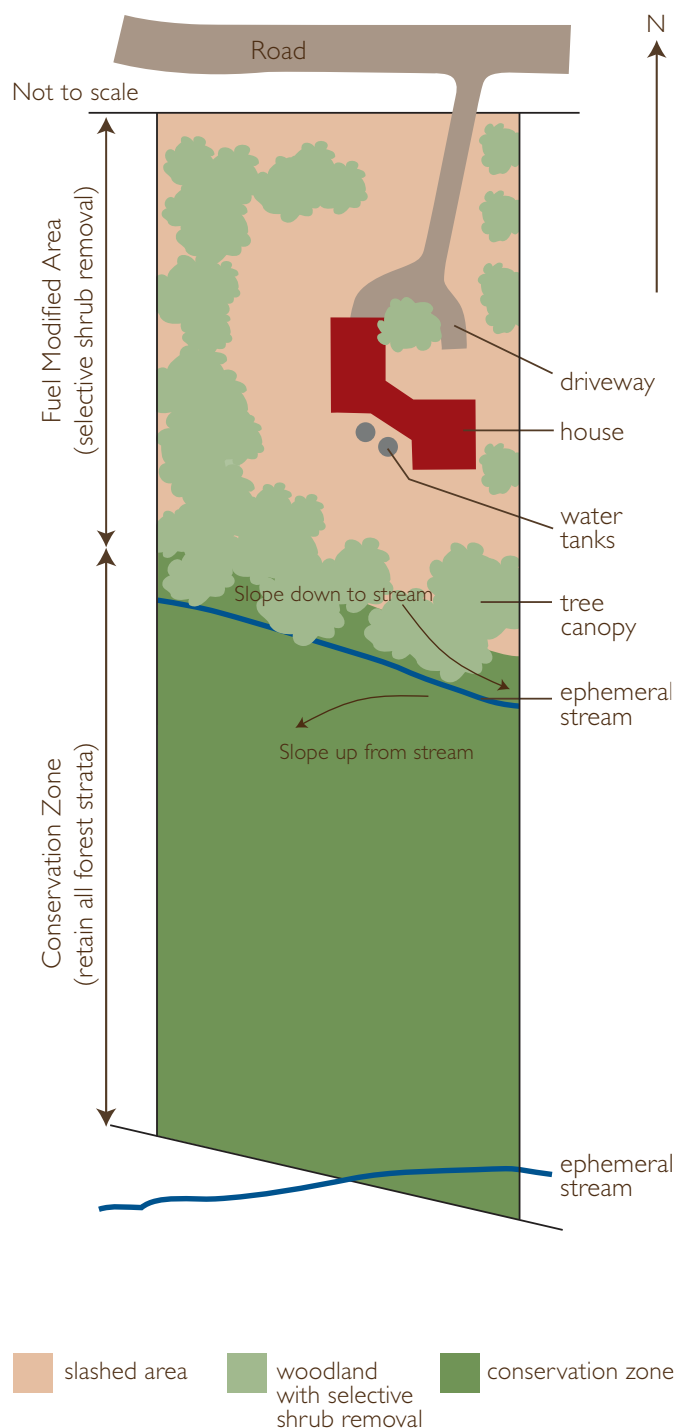
All this technical information was documented in a Property Management Plan that was presented to council in support of the owner's planning permit application.

Property Management Plans (PMP)

A PMP covers all of the land and shows existing and proposed conditions. The plan documents the Native Vegetation Framework "three step approach" to the design. (See more information)

A PMP documents the following:

- Location of vegetation types and quality
- Lists of weeds and native species
- Location of defensible space (fuel modified area) and its maintenance plan
- Survey of existing and proposed structures
- Areas of vegetation to be protected and restored, to offset removed vegetation
- Biodiversity threat management plan



Bushfires are survivable

The key to surviving a bushfire is to be self-reliant and well prepared by having a plan that suits the needs of your household.

Vegetation management alone is not enough.

A good bushfire survival plan includes house preparation, personal preparation, and what you will do in the event of a bushfire.

For information on developing your own Bushfire Survival Plan see CFA's Living in the Bush (2004). www.cfa.vic.gov.au

Left: Woodland where selective shrub removal will occur

The benefits

Taking advantage of existing low fuel hazards and using good house design means this landowner can look after native vegetation and manage bushfire risk.

“On-site meetings and documents like a PMP, can improve the standard of planning permit applications. This helps the approval process to be smoother and quicker. It can also increase the understanding and sense of ownership by the resident” – Shire of Yarra Ranges Planner.

Importantly, the landholder has been able to meet bushfire safety and native vegetation objectives, in a way that reflects their values.

The future

Reconciling property bushfire preparation and native vegetation management is a challenge that needs environmental managers, fire services and residents to work together.

CFA, in partnership with DSE, Shire of Yarra Ranges, Knox City Council, Nillumbik Shire and Manningham City Council, is piloting a project to develop tools and strategies that will help people limit impacts on native vegetation when preparing their property for bushfire.

This case study is part of that pilot project.

Photography by Sally Prideaux

More information

Contact your local council's environment department for vegetation management advice.

CFA (2004) *Managing vegetation around your home*
www.cfa.vic.gov.au

CFA (2002) *Building in a Wildfire Management Overlay Applicant's Kit*
www.cfa.vic.gov.au

CSIRO (1993) *Building in bushfire-prone areas – Information and advice.*
Standards Australia Handbook 36 -1993

DSE (2002) *Victoria's Native Vegetation Management – a framework for action.*
Department of Sustainability and Environment
www.dse.vic.gov.au

Ramsay, C and Rudolph, L (2003)
Landscape and Building Design for Bushfire Areas
CSIRO Publishing

Contacts

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