6. Fire and emergency management

6.1 Fire and emergency planning, prevention, response and recovery

Indicators

- Fire and emergency planning
- Impact by fire on park values
- Area burned by bushfire
- Area treated by planned burns and other fuel treatments
- Parks Victoria contribution to fire and emergency management
- Effectiveness of fire and emergency management programs

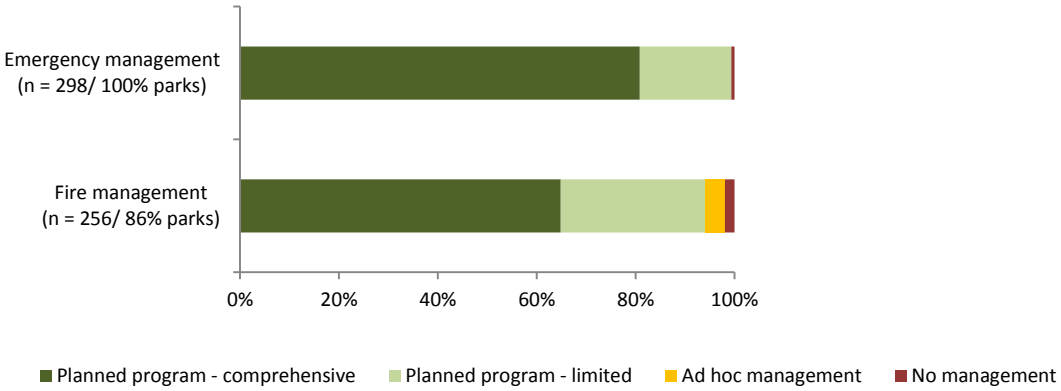
Context

Parks Victoria's plays as significant role in fire and emergency management as support agency and partner as part of an integrated whole of government planning and response program. For fire management, Parks Victoria supports the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to prepare for, respond to and recover from bushfires on public land. Parks Victoria also has a key support role in other emergency events including marine and water incident response (e.g. oil spills), flood events and cetacean strandings. A detailed summary of fire management activities can be found in the Parks Victoria Annual report.

Fire and emergency planning and management response

Park managers reported that the large majority of assessed parks had a comprehensive program of fire and emergency planning in place.

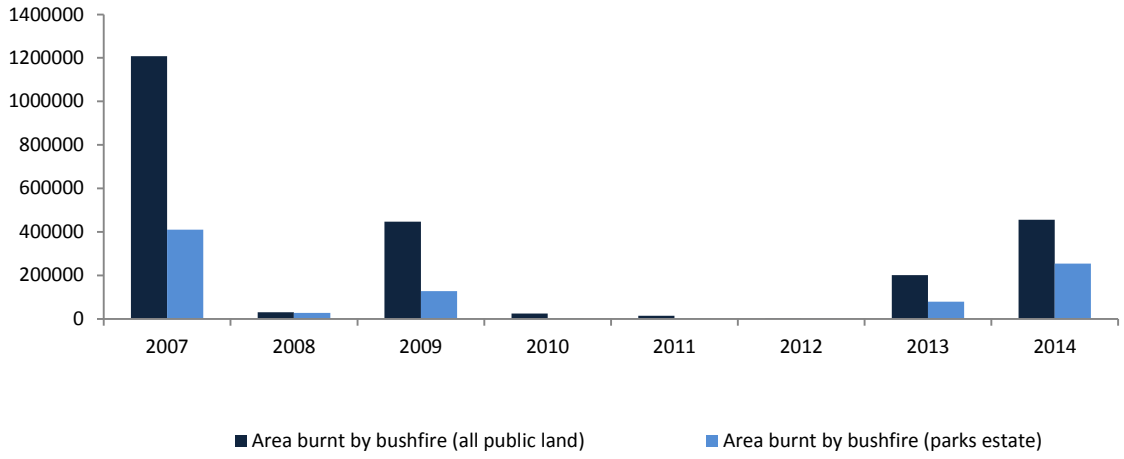
Figure 6.1.1 Fire and emergency management response



Area burned by bushfire

The areas of the parks estate burnt by bushfire and planned burning was highly variable between 2007 and 2014. In relation to bushfires in parks, the largest areas burnt occurred in 2007, 2009 and 2013, with some seasons such as 2011 and 2012 relatively benign.

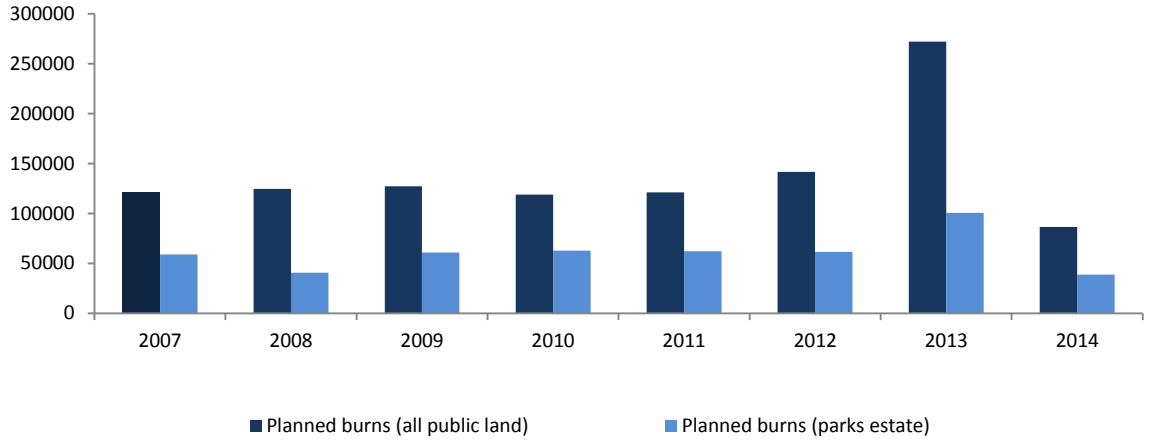
Figure 6.1.2 Area burnt by bushfire (Ha) 2007-2014



Area treated by planned burns and other fuel treatments

The area of the parks network treated by planned burning to reduce fire risk and/or improve ecological values increased overall but was variable, largely based on the suitability of weather conditions for planned burning. An extensive program of mechanical treatment to reduce fuel was also undertaken, particularly under the Melbourne Bushfire Prevention Program.

Figure 6.1.3 Area treated for fuel management by planned burns 2007-2014



Fire impact on park values

The majority of assessed parks reported that the of impact by fire on park values was minor or moderate, with 17% of parks (more than 30% by area) reporting the impact of fire was major or severe. Fire also had a significant impact on historic heritage values with 18% of parks reporting major impacts from fire.

The majority of parks reported that the impact of fire between 2010 and 2013 was stable, however 22% of parks reported that impacts on natural values had increased and 17% h reported that the impacts of fire on Aboriginal cultural values had increased.

See Appendix 6.1 for a map of the tolerable fire intervals.

Figure 6.1.4 Impact of fire on park values

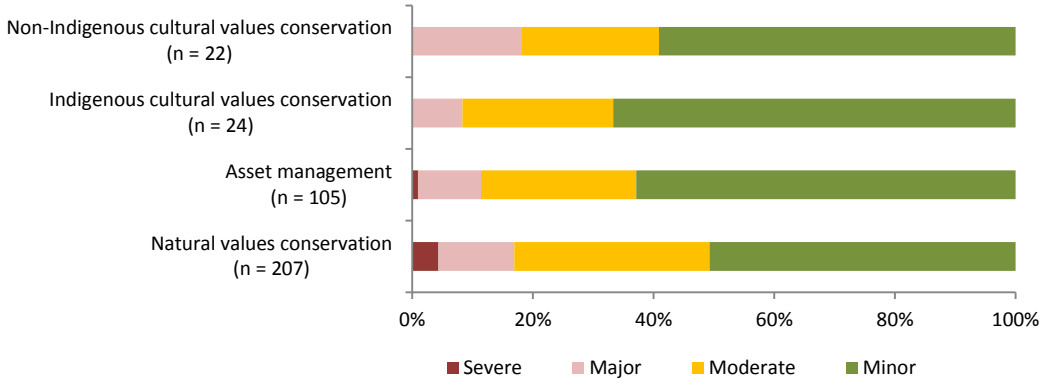
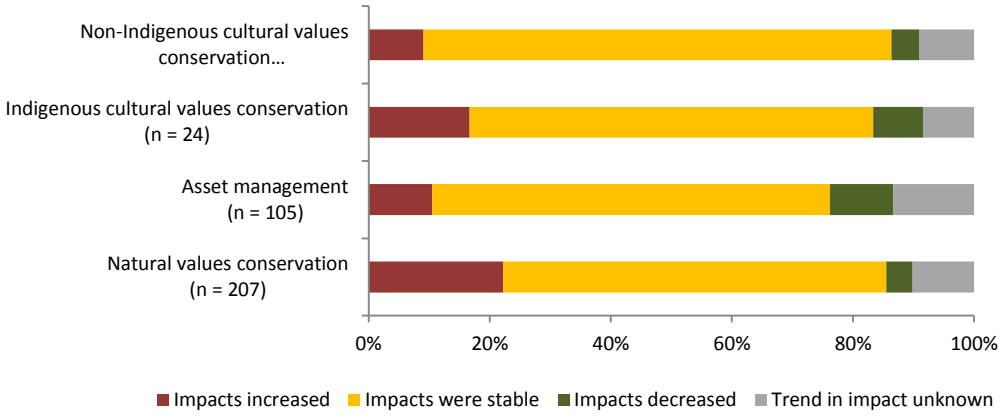


Figure 6.1.5 Trend in impact of fire on park values



Fire and emergency recovery

Extreme weather events, particularly fire and flood events have occurred with increasing regularity over the past decade. These events have had a major impact not only on parks infrastructure and services but especially on surrounding communities.

The return to wetter conditions in 2010 across the state limited bushfires through summer and allowed the continued regeneration of flora and fauna. Almost 100,000 hectares of parks and reserves managed by Parks Victoria were affected by the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires with 309 significant assets damaged or destroyed. Between 2010–11, Parks Victoria implemented the second and final year of an extensive rebuilding program.

Recovery works included rebuilding of visitor facilities (e.g. Grampians National Park, Bunyip State Park, Cathedral Range State Park and Kinglake National Park), repair and upgrades of roads, tracks and walking tracks and repairs at many heritage and cultural sites. Heritage and cultural surveys were also undertaken at locations such as Wilsons Promontory.

See Appendix 6.2 for a map of the native vegetation growth stages for 2013.

Fire ecology program

Progress was made towards determining appropriate long-term ecological fire regimes through the development of landscape-scale fire ecology assessments and risk assessments in partnership with DELWP. This information has been used to inform risk-based landscape fire plans throughout Victoria as part of integrated fire management.

Fire monitoring programs examining the effects of fire regimes on biodiversity were applied in some parks and reserves across Victoria. Programs such as “HawkEye”, Landscape Mosaic Burn monitoring and pre and post-fire monitoring continue to guide efforts to improve fire preparedness, while reducing impacts on biodiversity. The key areas for the HawkEye program include the East Gippsland, Mallee and Otways parks and reserves.

Various projects continued across the state to assess the impact of fire on biodiversity and vegetation structure including examining the abundance of introduced and native grazing species and how they influence vegetation recovery following fire on Yanakie Isthmus in Wilsons Promontory National Park and examining the response of small mammals to fire and identifying critical refuge habitats to enable recovery following disturbances in the Grampians National Park.

Effectiveness of fire and emergency management

Figure 6.1.6 Extent fire management objectives met