

A risk based approach to strategic bushfire planning

Fire Management Zone Review in the West Central Risk Landscape

Did you know that Fire Management Zones decide how fuel treatment is conducted on public land?

Our latest bushfire modelling has led to proposed changes to Fire Management Zones (FMZs) on public land in the West Central Bushfire Risk Landscape.

We are interested in hearing your thoughts about the proposed changes and what they might mean for your local area, as well as any local knowledge about landscape values we may have not considered.

A risk based approach to bushfire management

Bushfire risk is defined as the likelihood of a fire starting, spreading and impacting on people, property and the environment. Reducing the impacts of bushfires is challenging because we don't know exactly when and where they will actually occur.

We can model how bushfires spread in the landscape with Phoenix Rapidfire. Phoenix Rapidfire uses information about weather, topography, vegetation and fire history, to simulate and predict the spread and impact of bushfires and help us understand bushfire behaviour.

Using these simulations we can understand how bushfires are likely to behave and how assets and values might be impacted by bushfires. Fuel treatment activities can then be prioritised in those parts of the landscape where bushfire risk is high. Planned burning is the major management activity we do to reduce the risk of bushfires.

Where is the bushfire risk in West Central?

The West Central Bushfire Risk Landscape is in central Victoria, just to the west of Melbourne.

The cities of Bendigo and Ballarat as well as many towns in the West Central landscape are surrounded by forest and scrub.

Those towns with forest areas to their north west or south west are vulnerable as bushfires can quickly spread into populated areas, especially under the

influence of strong winds which we often experience on days of extreme bushfire danger.

In our landscape, higher risk locations include: Daylesford-Hepburn Springs, Blackwood, Trentham, the Gisborne-Woodend corridor, Castlemaine, and parts of Bendigo and Ballarat.



How is bushfire risk managed on public land?

We use Fire Management Zones (FMZs) to guide where we carry out fuel management works each year to minimise bushfire risk to local communities.

FMZs are areas of public land where fire is used for specific forest and park management objectives including management of bushfire risk and are described in the Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land.

There are four Fire Management Zones:

- Asset Protection Zone (APZ)
- Bushfire Moderation Zone (BMZ)
- Landscape Management Zone (LMZ)
- Planned Burning Exclusion Zone (PBEZ).

In all zones (except the PBEZ), fuel treatment may be carried out through a combination of planned burning and other appropriate methods such as mowing, slashing or vegetation removal.

Why review the Fire Management Zones?

The West Central Strategic Bushfire Management Plan was released in October 2014, which was our first step in adopting a risk-based approach. The plan set out a broad-scale strategy (the Priority Fuel Management Area) designed to balance the need to reduce the risk of major bushfires to life and property, while minimising impacts on natural ecosystems and other important assets and values.

The 2014 plan did not review the underlying Fire Management Zones. Updating the FMZs means that our annual fuel management program will be guided by a risk-based zoning scheme, working towards a state-wide residual risk target of 70 per cent.

What does this mean?

The changes to the Fire Management Zones may mean increases or decreases in the frequency of planned burns on public land located near you.

How was the review conducted?

Using Phoenix Rapidfire and the Victorian Fire Risk Register we identified high risk towns.

Then, by simulating over 8,000 bushfires across the landscape under the worst case bushfire conditions and highest possible forest fuel loads, we determined what the worst possible scenario would be (100 per cent residual risk) and then added fuel treatment simulations to see where the best places on public land were to reduce the risk to these towns.

We conducted various scenarios to see what the best combinations of fuel treatment would be to reduce the risk to life and property.

Additionally, an ecological values checking process was undertaken and some tradeoffs made between high value ecological areas and high value risk reduction areas.

What's next?

We are now seeking your input into the changes we are proposing to the Fire Management Zones. An overview map is attached for your information.

What you can do:

- Look at the maps in this [link](#) if you would like more information including detailed maps and a brief description relating to why an area may now be in a different FMZ.
- Send a email to west.central@delwp.vic.gov.au requesting a detailed map(s) for your area
- Send your comments using the attached feedback form to west.central@delwp.vic.gov.au or by post to West Central Bushfire Risk Landscape, Cnr Midland Hwy & Taylor St, Epsom VIC 3351.

Your comments will need to be received by **11 November 2016**.

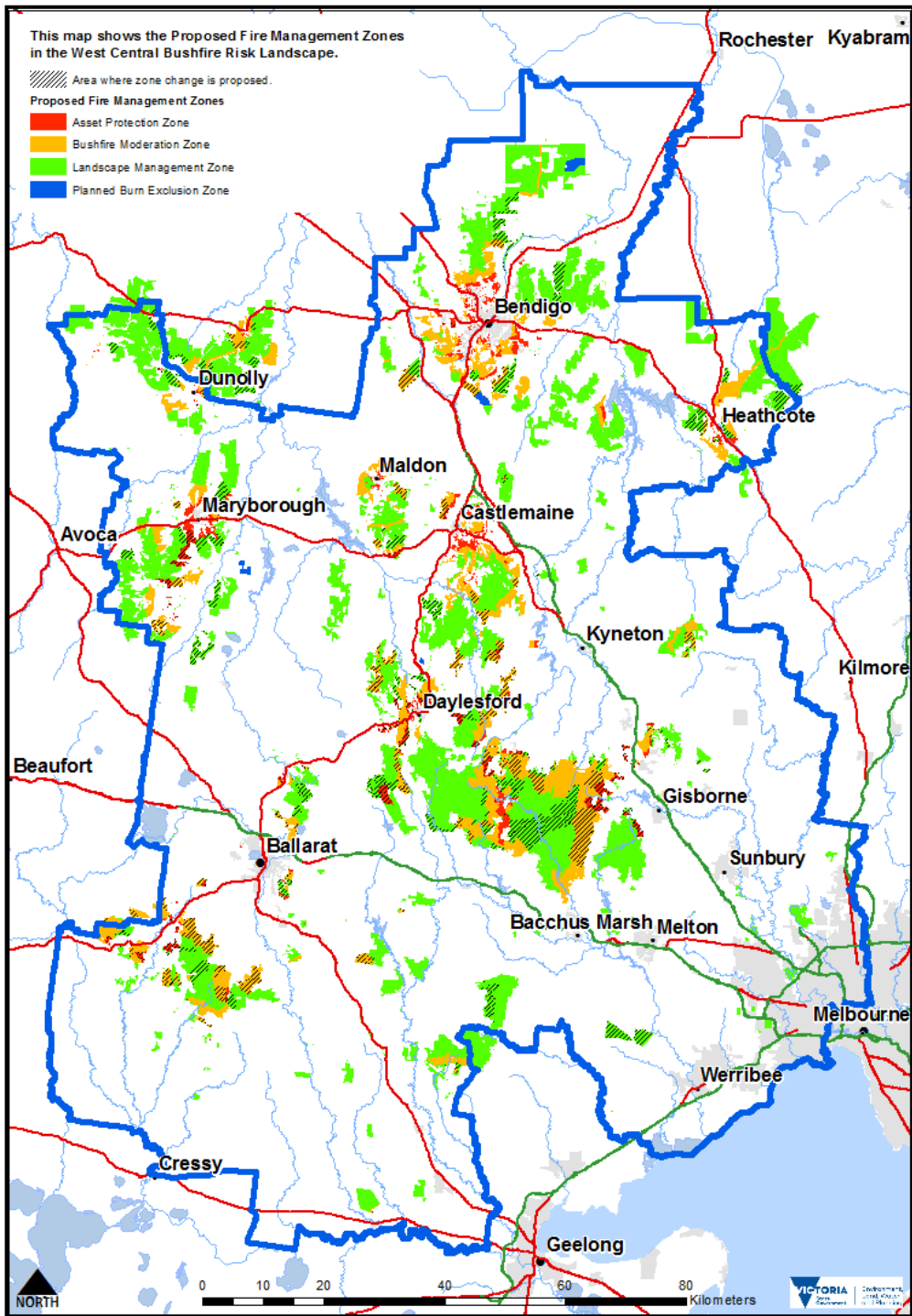
Our aim is to finalise the Fire Management Zones, taking into consideration your feedback and questions, by the end of December 2016.

We will keep you informed of our progress and the issues which matter to you and how we will respond to them.



Safer Together

More information about Safer Together, a new approach to reducing the risk of bushfire in Victoria can be found on DELWP's website: delwp.vic.gov.au > Fire and Emergencies > Safer Together.



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