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PWS – Feb 2019 - Fires update and impacts.

Informative information from PWS:

22/02/2019

To date, the fire area has affected around 94,000 ha (about 6%) of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) and approximately 42,476 ha (about 3.4%) of other reserves managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service. [More](https://www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?sys=News%20Article&intID=3909)

[PWS - Fires update and impacts](https://www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?sys=News%20Article&intID=3908)

20/02/2019

Background: A number of fires were ignited by dry lightning that crossed the state in late December 2018 and mid-January 2019. The storms of 15 January 2019 resulted in approximately 2,400 lightning strikes and caused over 60 new ignitions. [More](https://www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?sys=News%20Article&intID=3908)

[PWS Fire Update - Friday 15 February 2019](https://www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?sys=News%20Article&intID=3907)

15/02/2019

Parks and Wildlife Tasmania (PWS) can advise the following locations, reserves and tracks have been re-opened today (Friday 15 February).[More](https://www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?sys=News%20Article&intID=3907)

[More News »](https://www.parks.tas.gov.au/?base=5081)

PWS - Fires Update

PWS - Fires update and impacts

**20/02/2019 9.00am**

**Background**

A number of fires were ignited by dry lightning that crossed the state in late December 2018 and mid-January 2019. The storms of 15 January 2019 resulted in approximately 2,400 lightning strikes and caused over 60 new ignitions.

The Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service, in partnership with the Tasmania Fire Service, Sustainable Timber Tasmania and a number of interstate and international emergency service personnel, have been working for over a month in very hot, windy and sometimes unpredictable conditions in order to contain all the fires across Tasmania, prevent loss of human life and property as well as minimising the damage to natural and cultural heritage and critical infrastructure.

The long awaited and much appreciated rain and calmer weather conditions have aided the emergency service suppression efforts. However, the remainder of February and March are forecast to return to dry and warm conditions and this may see the fire situation change again.

To date, the fire area has affected around 94,000 ha, or about 6%, of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and approximately 42,476 ha, or 3.4%, of other reserves managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service. Much of the affected area within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area is in very remote and rugged terrain.

**Preliminary impact assessment**

The Parks and Wildlife Service have begun assessing the impacts of the fires on natural and cultural values, as well as built assets, such as walking tracks.

In addition, a desktop analysis of the mapped fire boundaries has provided some preliminary understanding of the impact. This analysis suggests that a variety of vegetation types ranging from communities that exhibit extreme fire sensitivity to communities that are fire adapted have been affected by the fires.

**Extreme fire sensitive** communities are vegetation communities that contain components that will not recover from fire. This includes communities such as rainforest with king billy pine, alpine conifer communities, alpine deciduous beech communities and rainforest with deciduous beech.

**Very High fire sensitive** communities are vegetation communities that have a degree of fire resilience. For example, rainforest will be impacted by fire but can recover as long as other disturbances are absent in the post-fire period. Examples of Very High fire sensitivity communities include alpine and subalpine heathland without conifers, rainforest without conifers, and mixed forest.

**Mixed forest** is a forest type that is transitional between wet eucalypt forest and rainforest. It consists of fire adapted eucalypts with a fire sensitive rainforest understorey.

**Fire adapted** communities are vegetation communities that are not only able to survive fire but require fire for healthy ecosystem functioning. Examples of fire adapted communities include buttongrass, native grassland, eucalypt forest, heathland and scrub.

Early analysis indicates that around 84% of the vegetation within the fire boundaries in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area is fire adapted. Buttongrass has already begun to reshoot in many places.

Less than 1% of the Extreme fire sensitivity communities occur within the current mapped fire boundary area. There is confirmation that some pencil pines on the Denison Range have been impacted. This is the only impact to conifers currently known and equates to around 0.007% of the mapped pencil pine extent across the state.

Within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, about 6% of the Very High fire sensitivity communities (excluding mixed forest) are within current fire boundaries and about 5% of the mixed forest is within current fire boundaries.

**It is important to note that many of these extreme and very high fire sensitive areas within the fire boundaries will not have burnt due to the patchiness of the fire and the low flammability of these communities.**

Other natural values that are known to be impacted include lunettes in the Lake Ada area. It is likely that some peat will have burnt in the fires also.

Several important Aboriginal cultural heritage values are known to be located within the fire boundaries. The impact of the fire on these values is not yet known but Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania have developed plans to assess any impacts.

*Extreme and Very High fire sensitivity threatened vegetation communities that are mapped within current fire boundaries within Parks and Wildlife Service managed areas.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Threatened vegetation community** | **Fire sensitivity** | **Conservation status** | **Area within current fire boundaries (ha)** |
| Pencil pine open woodland | Extreme | Rare | 0.5 |
| Pencil pine rainforest | Extreme | Rare | 0.8 |
| King billy pine rainforest | Extreme | Vulnerable | 4.8 |
| King billy pine subalpine scrub | Extreme | Rare | 7.0 |
| Cushion moorland | Very High | Rare | 3.3 |

Despite significant efforts to protect the heritage listed Churchill Hut along the Adamsfield Track it was destroyed by the fire.

**Parks and Wildlife Service actions and operations**

The Parks and Wildlife Service has used every tool available, including the use of heavy machinery, retardants and water-bombing, in order to halt fire spread and protect life, property and infrastructure.  Vulnerable natural, cultural and historic values have also been successfully defended from the fires to date. During the current fire-fighting efforts Parks has used many established remote area firefighting techniques as well as trialling new methods of fire suppression – some of which have come from implementation of the recommendations in the wake of the 2016 fires

Modelling of fire behaviour has enabled strategic, carefully considered water-bombing, the best placement of constructed firebreaks, the strategic application of long-term fire retardant, the installation of kilometres of sprinkler lines and the wrapping of heritage huts in sisalation to protect these timber structures from ember attack.

The Fuel Reduction Program burns conducted by the Parks and Wildlife Service in the TWWHA and other reserved land have also slowed the progress of the burn, particularly in the western parts of the TWWHA.

Fires impact

**West Coast**

The fires burning in this area include Lynch Hill (2818 ha), Western Hills (6,500 ha) and Fowl Creek (38 ha). The Murchison River fire burnt about 2.5 ha but is now extinguished.

**Mount Anne area group**

The fires in this group include Celtic Hill (3500 ha), Anne Gorge (1035 ha) and Gallagher Plateau (15 ha). These fires have not spread for a few weeks but still have hot spots around the edges and continue to be suppressed. Fire activity in this area slowed as the fire hit low fuel areas such as the Eliza Plateau, was actively suppressed, or reached boundaries of wetter vegetation.

Sprinkler lines have been installed as a preventative measure to the south of Lake Judd to reduce the likelihood of fire running up the ridgeline to Mount Sarah Jane and impacting sensitive king billy vegetation communities around Lake Judd and the other smaller lakes. Crews have returned to this sprinkler line to make adjustments, top up fuel tanks on pumps and to ensure they are operational.

***Mount Anne area impact report***

The fires in the Mount Anne area are currently relatively quiet. A Parks and Wildlife Service desktop analysis indicates the fire has predominately impacted on low fire-sensitivity vegetation such as buttongrass and scrub. Approximately 561 ha of Very High and Extreme fire-sensitivity communities, such as mixed forest, rainforest and alpine heathland, have been burnt. Most of this is forest, with only 2.8 ha of mapped alpine heathland within the fire boundary. It is important to note that this value will change and is likely to be reduced as a more accurate fire boundary becomes available. This is because areas of lower flammability vegetation will have remained unburnt within the fire scar. The iconic vegetation communities, such as the king billy forests, Pandani Shelf and the alpine community on the Eliza plateau have not been burnt. The High Camp hut has also not burnt.

**Southwest (south of Macquarie Harbour and west of Hardwood River)**

The fires burning in this area include Moores Valley (36,255 ha) and Dolphin Ridge (3023 ha) fires. These fires are all largely in fire-adapted buttongrass moorlands although there are areas of wet forest and rainforest that will have been burnt around the edge of the moorlands. There are some large stands of Huon pine in this area and brief aerial reconnaissance indicates these have remained unburnt.

***Southwest fires impact report***

The fires in the Southwest group have not progressed for a number of weeks and in many places have burnt to their natural boundaries. A Parks and Wildlife Service desktop analysis indicates that a total of 2,133 ha of Very High and Extreme fire sensitive vegetation occurs within these fire scars. This is predominately mixed forest, which is a transition state to rainforest. As such, mixed forest consists of fire adapted vegetation with fire-sensitive components. It is important to note that this value will change and is likely to be reduced as a more accurate fire boundary becomes available and unburnt patches are eliminated from within the boundary.

**Wilmot and Frankland Range**

The fires in this area include Wilmot Range (105 ha), Lake Pedder (7,428 ha), Wombat Peak (243 ha) and Mount Solitary (1,371 ha). These fires have run to natural boundaries and have not spread further for some days. The values in this area are similar to the Southwest group, with the fires being largely in buttongrass moorland. The Wombat Peak fire was most likely ignited by the lightning event of January 15th but did not appear until January 31st.

***Wilmot and Frankland Range impact report***

The fires in the Wilmot and Frankland Range have not progressed for a number of days and in many places have burnt to their natural boundaries. A Parks and Wildlife Service desktop analysis indicates that a total of 39.9 ha of Very High fire sensitive vegetation occurs within these fire scars. Similar to the above impact reports, this value is likely to change.

**Huon River area group**

The fires in this area have now all joined and are part of the Riveaux Road fire (64,030 ha). The recent rain and milder conditions has halted the spread of this fire.

**Gell River**

The Gell River fire (35,653 ha) was ignited in late December by a dry lightning storm that crossed the state on the evening of 27th December 2018. The fire has burnt through the Vale of Rasselas and up into the Denison, Gordon and Tiger Ranges and into the Florentine Valley. The western front of the fire reached Lake Gordon and travelled some way back up the Denison Range. Protection works for the western side of Lake Rhona were implemented as a precaution.

Protection works at Mount Field were initiated with sprinklers established around vulnerable vegetation communities on Tarn Shelf. Historic huts have been wrapped in sisailation to protect them from ember attack.

**Great Pine Tier**

The Great Pine Tier fire has burnt 55,328 ha and impacted a number of Highland Lakes communities. The fire has been mostly inactive for a number of days now.

Parks and Wildlife Service took actions to prevent the fire spreading into the Walls of Jerusalem National Park and western lakes area. Firefighters constructed containment lines, consisting of a handline and sprinklers in the Lake Ada area. The firebreak is a combination of slashed line that follows an existing track and a section of handline.

***Great Pine Tier impact report***

The calmer weather over the last few weeks has meant that the Great Pine Tier fire has not progressed for some time, although there are still active hotspots. A Parks and Wildlife Service desktop analysis indicates that a total of 2,399.6 ha of Very High and Extreme fire sensitive vegetation occurs within this fire boundary. Only 0.2 ha of this value is of Extreme fire sensitivity. Most of the fire sensitive communities occur in the northern section of the fire, to the west of Liawenee.

**Other fires**

There are a number of other fires burning in parks and reserves outside of these areas. These include Precipitous Bluff (1 ha), Nevada Peak (4 ha) and Hylands Road, Murdunna (43 ha), which are currently contained. Other fires include Jubilee Range (60 ha) and Rapid River (477 ha).

[](https://www.parks.tas.gov.au/IntranetNewsWS_Image.aspx?id=3923&type=full&sb=.jpg)

**Buttongrass reshooting in recently burnt areas (photo credit: Stu Gibson)**

[](https://www.parks.tas.gov.au/IntranetNewsWS_Image.aspx?id=3924&type=full&sb=.jpg)

**Sprinkler lines prevented any damage to fire sensitive communities at Lake Rhona (photo credit: Stu Gibson)**

[](https://www.parks.tas.gov.au/IntranetNewsWS_Image.aspx?id=3925&type=full&sb=.jpg) **Alpine community on Pandani Shelf (photo credit: Stu Gibson)**

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