

Project Synopsis

Project commencement:	March 2007
Project completion:	June 2009
Total project investment:	\$421,625

'Changing fire patterns in the northern and central Kimberley'

Project Aim

Reduce the negative impact of fires in northern and central Kimberley. The Kimberley region's mid-to-late dry season fires often spread over hundreds of kilometres and burn for weeks on end. This fire pattern is degrading ecosystems, reducing the pastoral economic potential and damaging cultural sites.

In an effort to reduce the devastation of northern and central Kimberley fires Rangelands NRM WA contracted the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) at Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary to manage a new initiative – EcoFire.

"During the mid-to-late dry season fires tend to burn more intensely and extensively due to the higher temperatures and winds. EcoFire aims to reduce the extent of mid-to-late dry season fires so that flora and fauna has a better chance of survival," said Rangelands NRM WA Program Manager Ms Liz Brown.

Key Outcomes:

- Decreased effects of fire within the central and northern Kimberley;
- Decrease in the size of late season fires;
- Protection of cultural values;
- Protection of endangered wildlife including the Purple-crowned fairy wren and Gouldian finch;
- Improved communication and consultation between land holders in the central and northern Kimberley;
- Protection of pastoral assets including stock, infrastructure and land.

The Challenge

"Previously, land holders would address fire management at the property level. This is not very effective when the unmanaged fires are much bigger than single properties," said Ecofire Communications Coordinator Dr. Joanna Axford.

EcoFire is guided by a steering committee consisting of Government agencies, land owners and managers, community groups and Rangelands NRM WA representatives. AWC works with land owners to produce a regional burn plan that co-ordinates prescribed fire management across property boundaries.

"Most people were extremely responsive to the idea. Through discussions with them each year we work out flight plans, map areas and prepare for burning in April and May," said Joanna.

Once planning is complete, the prescribed burning is carried out mostly by dropping incendiaries from an R44 helicopter. During 2008, AWC staff and landowners flew over 24,000 kilometres and dropped over 30,000 incendiaries in strategic firebreaks over the project areas.

On Mornington, AWC is carrying out research about how fire patterns affect biodiversity, and using these results to infer the impact of EcoFire over the project area. AWC also collaborates with the Department of Agriculture and Food to monitor the effects of prescribed and unplanned fires on the productivity and longterm health of pasture grasses.



Our Successes

The success of the project has seen other groups seek to replicate the EcoFire model- a similar project is being developed in the East Kimberley, for example.

“There is no doubt EcoFire has changed fire patterns in the northern and central Kimberley. Since the project began we have had pastoralists visit us to tell us of the benefits they are seeing from the project,” said Liz Brown.

“We have also received a great deal of support from Government bodies including Fire and Emergency Services Authority, the Department of Environment and Conservation, the Department of Agriculture and Food, and the Kimberley Land Council,” Ms Brown said.

Joanna Axford reported that within the Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary the biological and social benefits of EcoFire are significant.

“EcoFire is helping to protect threatened species including Gouldian finches, Purple-crowned fairy wrens and small to medium sized mammals,” said Joanna.

“EcoFire brings together pastoralists, Indigenous communities, private and public conservation groups and Government agencies to better deliver fire management in the central and north Kimberley,” said Joanna.

Benefits to the Kimberley Region

Since the commencement of the project EcoFire has achieved the following outcomes:

- Decrease in the size and incidence of late season fires;
- Increased 'patchiness' of fires;
- Greater protection to environmentally significant areas;
- Increased pastoral and asset protection;
- Greater community engagement and awareness of the impact of fire in the central and northern Kimberley;
- Greater protection of endangered species including the Purple-crowned fairy wren and Gouldian finch.

This project was made possible through assistance from:

- Rangelands NRM WA
- Australian Government
- Western Australian Government
- Australian Wildlife Conservancy

For further information see the Rangelands NRM WA website

www.rangelandswa.com.au

email info@rangelandswa.com.au

or call on 08 9941 9743



Australian Government

