

Prescribed burning in the Eltham Gateway

Firestick Estate Inc. - 4 August 2016

Introduction

In response to a letter to Firestick Estate from the Prime Minister's Office, saying the States have primary responsibility for extreme bushfire matters, we wrote to the Victoria's Premier Andrews to verify. We requested "...the locations of prescribed burns over the last decade for the 13,000 hectare overlapping quadrants, formed ten kilometres north and west of the Warrandyte and Eltham death trap bridges" (9 May 2016).

The Victorian Government responded with "The area you have referred to in your email as the Eltham Gateway contains approximately 1,100 hectares of public land...Please find attached a map showing the location of planned burning...(the Victorian Government)...have conducted over the last 10 years..." (7 June 2016).

The map shows the 13,000ha area with the 7 "planned burning" sites coloured in red:

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|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. North Warrandyte | Glynns Road. |
| 2. Eltham | Laughing Waters Road (East). |
| 3. Eltham | Laughing Waters Road (West). |
| 4. Eltham | Banoon Road. |
| 5. Plenty | Goldsworthy Lane (North). |
| 6. Plenty | Goldsworthy Lane (South). |
| 7. Mill Park | Stockdale Way. |

Firestick Estate have visited the 7 "planned burns" to assess their value to the Eltham Gateway, based on:

1. The natural vegetation as seen prior to white settlement, (1788); "well grassed downs alternated with groups of tall, handsome trees" (Gammage, 2011).
2. Killer extreme bushfires in Victoria are initially fanned by north, changing to south-west winds, effectively herding panicked people to the south and east (Bushfire Death Trap-The Eltham Gateway, Malseed & Packham).
3. A recent finding that "...the burning of public land is necessary for community safety..." (the bipartisan approved Bushfires Royal Commission Final Report).

The abbreviations used in the assessments are: ~≈approximately, %=per cent, T=tree, t=tonnes, S=scrub, G=grass, ha=hectare, H=height, D=diameter above base, mm=millimetre, m=metre, CL=centre line or distance between plants, 6T/ha=6 trees per hectare, 6t/ha=6 tonnes per hectare, HF=heavy dry fuel on ground, FFF=forest fine fuel on ground.

1. North Warrandyte ~47ha

Location: North Warrandyte, road entrance on Glynn's Road, 700m south of junction with Overbank Road.

Vegetation: T@~70% & G@~30%, Older T up to 700mmD @ 20m+H & ~38mCL or 7T/ha. Newer trees 70mm to 200mmD@ 6m to 20mH & ~3mCL or 1100T/ha. ~10% of standing T dead. S patches@30mCL, HF ~30t/ha, FFF~15t/ha.

Burnt: ~60%

Value of Burn: ~70% of ~47ha is ~33ha, 60% of ~33ha is ~20ha

Comments:

Surrounded on 3 sides by the Yarra River, this is the smallest risk area to prescribed burn in the Eltham Gateway. The burns strategic value to the car gridlock trapped residents is minimal because it is located at the extreme south-east of the Eltham Gateway. The steep north-east section up from the river, has not been burnt, negating the burns value in terms of a less than extreme bushfire from the East. The natural 1788 order of the older T@7T/ha has been destroyed by allowing suckers to become newer T@1100T/ha, now degraded. It appears the Victorian Government has systematically made this area a T&S extreme bushfire hazard, in the vicinity of residential suburbs, that they have attempted but are apparently unable, to properly prescribe burn.

2. Eltham ~14ha

Location: Eltham, extending south west from the junction of Laughing Waters Road and Overbank Road.

Vegetation: T@100mm to 400mmD@10 to 20m+H@~5.5mCL or ~300T/ha, ~20% T dead, patches of 1m to 2m S to 20% of area, HF~40t/ha, FFF~20t/ha.

Burnt: ~30%

Value of Burn: ~30% of ~14ha is ~4ha

Comments:

This is probably the second smallest risk area to prescribed burn in the Eltham Gateway. Despite that, an ~8m wide strip along the north section adjoining Laughing Waters Road extending to ~150m wide at the north-west corner, is shown on the map to be burnt, but is not burnt. Cars on Laughing Waters Road are ~3m from S, 1m to 2.4mH@ 0.8mCL or ~15,000S/ha. The Victorian Government Radiant Heat guidelines of 140m for enclosures within Community Safer Places, makes fatalities of panicked and disorientated motorists trapped during an extreme bushfire predictable. It appears the long standing practice of the Victorian Government preventing traditional 1788 cooler fires and healthy well-spaced T, free of S, has resulted in a degraded extreme bushfire hazard, which Government appear to be unable to prescribe burn properly.

3. Eltham ~4ha

Location: Eltham, 720m south west from the junction of Laughing Waters Road and Overbank Road.

Vegetation: T@100mm to 400mmD, 10m to 20m+H, @~5.5mCL or ~300T/ha, ~20% T dead, patches of 1m to 2m S to ~10% of area, HF~40t/ha, FFF~10t/ha

Burnt: About 40%

Value of Burn: 40% of ~4ha is ~2ha

Comments:

The ~90m wide high voltage power line reserve between Area 2 & 3 has recently lost its integrity as a fire-break, with ~80% of the area covered in 7mm to 30mmD&0.5m to 3mH S @2mCL or 2,500S/ha

4. Eltham ~1ha

Location: Eltham, on north bank of Yarra River, 180m south of the junction of Banoon Road and Hillcrest Ave.

Vegetation: Big River Flat T. One T on ground~1100mmD, 40m+ long, S to ~40% of area, ~30% S & T dead, HF~50t/ha, FFF~25t/ha.

Burnt: No evidence of burn observed

Value of Burn: Nil

Comments:

The ground is littered with dead T, branches and S. The gorge like land form that creates an observed south-west wind channel, will make this section of the Yarra River Park a high fuel extreme bushfire wick into residential areas, following an extreme bushfire wind change. It appears the Victorian Government has systematically made this area a degraded T&S extreme bushfire hazard, that they appear to be unable to prescribe burn.

5. Plenty ~16ha

Location: Plenty, Plenty Gorge Parklands, 250m south-west of junction of Memorial Drive and Goldsworthy Lane.

Vegetation: G, recently planted with a mix of bushfire prone T & S, 500mm to 4mH @1.2mCL in furrows 3mCL, ~2780 T & S/ha.

Burnt: Not evident

Value of Burn: Nil

Comments:

It is doubtful this is a legitimate prescribed burn site. The area has been recently planted by the Victorian Government, with fire prone trees increasing the risk of future extreme bushfire ember attach to a medium density suburb 1.4 kilometres downwind to the south-east. The planting design makes future grass slashing impractical, which will increase the hazard.

6. Plenty ~16ha

Location: Plenty, Plenty Gorge Parklands, 1140m south-west of junction of Memorial Drive and Goldsworthy Lane.

Vegetation: G

Burnt: Not evident

Value of Burn: Nil

Comments:

It is doubtful this is a legitimate prescribed burn site. A single year's grass burn may enhance grass growth in subsequent years.

7. Mill Park ~10ha

Location: Mill Park, Plenty Gorge Parklands, between Stockdale Way and Vanbrook Drive

Vegetation: Old T 600mm to 800mmD & 20m+H@ ~20mCL or ~25T/ha, ~30% dead. Smaller T 70mm to 200mmD & 10m+H@ ~15mCL or ~44T/ha, 20% dead, S patches @~30mCL, HF ~40t/ha, FFF~15t/ha.

Burnt: No evidence of burn observed

Value of Burn: Nil

Comments:

As part of the forested area in the Plenty Gorge, this is a high strategic value prescribed burn site, because it is in the north-west sending flaming embers into suburbia and the car gridlocked death trap bridges area. The fact that we found no evidence of the prescribed burn marked on the map in red suggests the Victorian Government has little understanding of the dynamics of extreme bushfire. Houses are about 40m from the T canopy, with No.110 Stockdale Way ~25m from the dangerous Victorian Government planting of bushfire prone T&S up to 9mH. The Victorian Government Radiant Heat guidelines of 140m for enclosures within Community Safer Places, makes house losses and fatalities of panicked and disorientated motorists trapped during a fire front, predictable. The kangaroos observed seeking grass on Stockdale Way, with ground evidence of many others moving at will through breaks in a high fence, will predictably perish in an extreme bushfire driven by the high fuels seen in this area. Victorian Governments have systematically turned this traditional 1788 low risk area, into a degraded suburban T&S high risk extreme bushfire hazard, that they appear unable to prescribe burn.

Conclusions

<u>Area</u>	<u>Gross ha</u>	<u>Burn %</u>	<u>Effective ha</u>
1.	~47	~42	~20
2.	~14	~30	~ 4
3.	~ 4	~40	~ 2
4.	~ 1	0	0
5.	~16	0	0
6.	~16	0	0
7.	~10	0	0

Net observed effective burn (10y) ~26ha

Plus 20% (plus or minus error) ~**31ha**

VBRC 10yr target, 80% of 1100ha 880ha

Score: disastrously inadequate ~**3.5%**

Comments

Firestick Estate concludes the strategically important forested part of the Plenty Gorge is too dangerous for the Victorian Government to even prescribe burn. The **disastrously inadequate** prescribed burning seen at the 7 sites, appears caused by decades long, misguided vegetation policy, that is ignorant of the history of vegetation and extreme bushfire in Australia. The evidence clearly demands political action to restore our bush areas to their natural, healthy and safe state. This political action must happen before there are hundreds if not thousands of deaths from an extreme bushfire in the Eltham Gateway.

Disclaimer: All assessments and comment by local lay people, to be reviewed by appropriate bushfire experts, before being seen as correct.

Tim Malseed (president@firestickestate.com)
Belinda Clarkson (secretary@firestickestate.com)
Firestick Estate Inc.