



HOT TOPICS

Celebrating our network

November/December 2019

Central Australian crews jump in to lend a hand

By Tom Morrison, Fire Management Officer
Alice Springs

Wednesday 6 November, myself and Blake Debney from the Alice Springs Volunteer Bushfire Brigade had received confirmation that we would be required to assist with a wildfire in the vicinity of Yulara. The fire had been backing into the wind for a few days and fire scars in the area had failed to extinguish it. Parks had been monitoring the fire extensively and had limited success with pulling it up, being that it seemed to find small corridors of higher fuel to keep advancing.

We travelled down and met with Tegan from Parks, the Natural and Cultural Resource Manager who had been managing the fire. Tegan suggested a reconnaissance flight to survey fuel and assess where the fire was going. Malya Teamay, a traditional owner with extensive fire experience also came for the flight. He was able to give us an insight as to what the fire was going to do, what fires had done in the past, and make us aware of any cultural considerations we needed to be aware of.

Following the flight, we put some plans together to undertake a direct attack strategy from the black. Blake and I headed into the desert along with parks resources ready to gear up and join us within the next hour. Success! While the spinifex was burning hot we used the lee side of a sand dune (more broken fuel) to give us the fighting chance, using water on the areas we could get a vehicle to, blowers and rake hoes for the tops of the dunes we managed to halt its advance. The additional crews supplied by Parks sped the process up and within 4 hours we'd been able to knock the edge down and put a break in place to hold it overnight.

The following morning with no visible smoke or hotspots we handed the fire back over to parks to manage then travelled north again.

Lessons learnt, know how to use a jack, you'll get a lot of flats.

I'd like to thank Blake for his efforts and generosity, taking 2 days off work to come and assist with managing this fire. Parks were also very grateful for his assistance and impressed with his fire knowledge.



Aerial shot of fire

Katherine Bushfire

By Lee Fortmann, Edith Farms Bushfire Volunteers

Whilst our hearts go out to all those affected by and continuing to fight the fires in NSW and Qld we here in 'little old' Katherine had our own 'UNPRECEDENTED' fire incident.

On Saturday 19 October, a fire started just north of Katherine in Stuart Estate (police are still investigating). With the high winds and dry conditions our attempts to halt the spread were a drop in the ocean. Unfortunately the fire jumped the railway line and took hold in the Stuart Hwy side of the Charles Darwin University. BFNT (Katherine) along with Katherine Volunteer Brigade (KVFBB) and Edith Farms Volunteer Brigade (EFVBB) were pushed to exhaustion to try and halt the spread. Over the next 7 days the fire would continue to spread – eventually scorching over 40,000 hectares of land.

Bushfires NT staff, private land holders/stakeholders and volunteers were battling a blaze that was now stretching out on 5 fronts. It was said at one time early in the week “this is going all the way to the Fergusson”, they had been battling this blaze since Saturday and would continue to over the following week. Individuals from both EFVBB and KVFBB put in over 100 hours to try to save property as the fierce fire spread at a rate of 22km a day.

All those involved in this event were invited to attend a debrief hosted by Bushfires NT Katherine office on Saturday 2 November, at the EFVBB Head Quarters – even the 'big bosses' of Bushfires NT came down from Darwin. The information that was provided on the day was informative, well-presented and very insightful and no one was looking to lay blame for the outcome that eventuated over that week. What did happen was the debrief, a forum for all those involved to look forward and ask how can we build our capacity for future events such as this.

There were some really brilliant suggestions (especially from the private land holders) – one that stands out was the suggestion to get magnetic ID numbers for those in private vehicles – no good the chopper pilot saying 'white ute with tank on back' – they were all 'white' utes. To use this simple and relatively cheap form of ID for private vehicles to be identified by the chopper pilot would make life much easier in this type of scenario.

Another great suggestion was that all brigades have an up to date audit of all available machinery (graders etc) in the area belonging to land holders – to be able to call upon those in the event of an emergency.

A big thank you to those who attended the debrief to offer suggestions and positive feedback to assist us moving forward in the event of further catastrophic situations. Don't get me started on the 'climate change' band wagon!!!!

A sincere thank you to those from EASA, the Red Cross and the Minister from the Council of Churches, who came to listen and CARE and will continue to be there for those who need to seek solace in the face of 'losing everything'.

The Northern Territory Government Community Benefit Fund

The Milne Volunteer Bushfire Brigade gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Northern Territory Government for funding the construction of a vehicle wash down bay funded through a Community Benefit Fund Grant.



Ray Nicholls Shed Open day coming up in 2020

By Pam Wanrooy, Cox Peninsula Volunteer Bushfire Brigade

Cox Peninsula Volunteer Bushfire Brigade do not have a fire depot, so the brigade had operated out of volunteers homes for many years. Raymond had a dream 10 years ago to have a fire shed built to protect the vehicles, pumps and other tools from the elements.

His dream came to reality 3 years ago when the Wagait Shire Council agreed for a fire shed to be built on their land. In support Bendigo Bank donated \$80,000, Gary Higgins MLA donated \$50,000 and Venita donated \$10,000. Numerous fund raisers were then organised by Raymond and other volunteers to raise extra money to have the fire shed completed.

After 7 hard years of fundraising the Cox Peninsula Volunteer Bushfire Brigade shed will now be officially opened by Gary Higgins MLA on 26 January 2020 at 10.30am. The opening will be held after Council's Australia Day Ceremony which begins at 9.30am.

We are very proud of our Captain Raymond, who has captained our brigade of 12 members. He has ensured that vehicles are kept clean at all times, fuelled and full of water ready to attend fires at short notice. All vehicles are always maintained to high expectations.

We welcome everyone to celebrate with us at the official opening.

Mark this day in your diary everyone and we look forward to seeing you all!

Exceptional winners

We are extremely proud of our outstanding volunteers who were nominated for this year's Volunteer of the Year Awards.

Congratulations to the nominees of the night and well done to all the exceptional winners, many from Bushfires NT who have done us proud. You all give more than you know and we are lucky to be working with you

2019 Winners:

- Bev Shuker - NT Volunteer of the Year
- Bev Shuker - INPEX Lifetime Contribution to Volunteering
- Dean McManamny - Emergency Service Volunteer
- George Low - Excellence in Volunteer Management

Nominees:

- Benjamin Balmer - Alice Springs Excellence in Volunteer Management
- Joshua Clarke - Central Aust. Lifetime Contribution to Volunteering
- David McLachlan - Volunteer of the Year
- Paul Pokorny - Volunteer of the Year

Certificates of Appreciation:

- Chris Edwards
- Cindy Holden
- Darryn Clarke
- George Watts
- Karen Percival
- Lisa Carusi
- Maureen Kolman
- Samantha Trott
- Simon Casey
- Susan Jones

Well done and thank you!!



Award winners



George Low - Excellence in Volunteer Management



Dean McManamy - Emergency Service Volunteer



Certificates of Appreciation Central Australia



Bev Shuker - Winner NT Volunteer of the Year and INPEX Lifetime Contribution to Volunteering



Certificates of Appreciation Top End

Bushfires NT assist Queensland in a State of Emergency

By Maggie Towers, Bushfire Information Manager

Just as the Top End fire season began to wind down, the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) were warning of severe to catastrophic fire danger along the east coast of Australia. By early November, bushfires in NSW and QLD were plastered across our television screens. Qld and NSW declared a State of Emergency for swathes of their regions due to the raging bushfires occurring across densely populated areas. Both states made a call for National assistance. The Northern Territory Government responded and Police, Fire and Emergency Services (PFES) began to coordinate teams for deployment.

The first deployment was sent to assist south-east Queensland on the 12 November. This team consisted of 20 firefighters from the Fire and Rescue Service (NTFRS) and 9 mixed – skilled emergency workers from both the tri-services (Police, Fire & Emergency Services) and Bushfires NT. The firefighters formed what is known as a 'Strike-team' and the mixed-skilled emergency workers formed an Incident Management Team (IMT). Both teams were deployed to the Boonah Incident Control Centre (ICC) in south-east Queensland.

When we arrived on the 12 November, 6 large, complex fires were burning in the region. Many towns had been evacuated and others were getting ready to leave.

I was tasked in the Planning Unit of the IMT. The other members of this team were Krissy Riley (Bushfires NT) and Keith Hutton (NTFRS). We worked 12 hour night shifts for five nights. Our role was primarily to develop an Incident Action Plan (IAP) for the following shift. The IAP involves evaluation and analysis of intelligence on the current and forecast situation including a tactical options analysis, resource forecasting, risk assessments and, most importantly the document aims to build a common operating picture so that everyone is working on the same page, for the same outcome.

We worked closely with our interagency team consisting of the Incident Controller (QFES and NTFRS), Operations (NT Police & NTFRS), Public Information (NT Police), and Logistics (NTFRS). One of the biggest challenges faced by the team was utilising unfamiliar systems, databases, toolkits, acronyms and procedures. Our team worked fantastically together, each bringing a diverse range of skills to the table. I think everyone within the IMT would say that they had a great experience and can bring new insights back to their teams in the NT.



Krissy Riley and Maggie Towers



The Incident Control Centre, Boonah

Fire Protection Zones

Fire Protection Zones (FPZs) are gazetted and managed by Bushfires NT under the Bushfires Management Act 2016. They are areas of heightened bushfire risk around major towns as a result of rural development and community amenity. Controls are enforced to reduce risk including a permit to burn for all fires at all times; and a requirement for perimeter and structure firebreaks. The FPZs also act as a buffer for the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service's Emergency Response Areas in the built up areas of towns.

There are four FPZs in the NT: the Northern, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. The Northern FPZ remains unchanged. The Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs FPZs were 50km radius circles centred at either the post office or airport. These circles did not consider bushfire risk and randomly split properties making workable fire management lines and enforcement difficult.

For the majority of landholders who remain in a FPZ there will be no change. Bushfires NT will be working with landholders, that are now either included or outside of the FPZ, of their changed responsibilities. See NR Maps for updated FPZs https://nrmaps.nt.gov.au/nrmaps.html?search=fire_protection_zones&fireprotzone=Northern



Example of old and updated Katherine Fire Protection Zone

Retiring (again)!

By Wendy Coghlan, Training and Extension Officer
Bushfires NT

Many of our volunteers know and love Kevin Natt, a long standing member of the Bushfires NT team who has made the decision to retire from his role as a volunteer instructor and assessor with the Bushfires NT training team.

Kevin retired as a Bushfires NT staff member some years back after managing the vehicles for the volunteer program for 30 years. He then continued as a trainer and instructor for volunteer training courses and was appointed as the first captain of the Volunteer Training Brigade.

It is with great regret that we are losing Kevin as a part of our team but we appreciate all that he has given to Bushfire Volunteers across the Territory in each of the roles he has taken on.

Kevin has proven to be an engaging, entertaining and jovial trainer with a wealth of knowledge and experience. He relates well to people from all backgrounds and ages and has always shown himself to be progressive, adaptable and considerate of others. He is always a pleasure to work with.

I am certain that both staff and volunteers across the Territory would like to wish him well in his retirement and we extend an open invitation to stop in and see us whenever he has the opportunity in the future.

Thank you Kev, you will be sorely missed.



Training Update

By Wendy Coghlan, Training and Extension Officer
Bushfires NT

Well done to the 9 new brigade volunteers who successfully completed the Fire Fighter 1 NT program on 9 and 10 November during the final training course for 2019 at the Berry Springs Volunteer Bushfire Brigade headquarters.

A big thank you goes out to all who attended and their contributions to an engaging and enjoyable weekend of training. I was ably assisted by Raymond Nicholls and Ian Stewart in delivering the course content and we were all assisted by Haiden Delaney-Phillips who himself undertook the training early this year and is considering a possible role in training in the future.

We would like to congratulate the participants and wish them all the best for their association with Bushfires NT into the future. We would also like to thank them, along with all of our other amazing volunteers, for their time, efforts and offers to assist their local brigades and communities managing fires in the landscape.

Where to from here?

Those volunteers who have completed their FF1 NT training, if they have yet to do so, need to complete their Authorised Bushfire Volunteer (ABV) applications either on line or through their Brigade Captains.

Once all of the documentation has been received, the Executive Director of Bushfires NT, Collene Bremner will consider the application and is responsible for approving the appointments.

On appointment as a Bushfires NT ABV the appointee will be issued an ABV card and their Personal Protective Clothing.

Then our experienced brigade members will mentor and accompany the new volunteers through the brigade activities and fire ground operations to further develop their skills and experience to safely manage fires within the organisational and brigade structures.

To all those wonderful individuals who have participated in Bushfires NT training in 2019, I very much appreciate your involvement and engagement and I hope that it assists to protect lives, property and the environment from the threat of wildfires well into the future.



Our newest volunteers to undertake FF1

The importance of pre- and post- operation vehicle inspections

Pre- and post- vehicle inspections are essential to the safe and efficient operation of a fleet. A good pre-operation inspection prevents the driver from leaving a site with a vehicle that has an existing problem. A good post-operation inspection allows time for a problem that has been identified to be fixed before the vehicle goes back out on the road.

It is therefore best practice for the driver of a vehicle to carry out a thorough inspection before and after a vehicle is operated. Good, thorough inspections, require training drivers on the proper way to perform them along with the training on the processes to report any issues identified or of concern.

Bushfires NT, as part of new fleet management arrangements, will shortly provide brigades with a vehicle inspections check list and reporting guidelines and procedures. In the meantime Bushfires NT encourages all brigades to ensure their internal inspections and processes are followed, ensure these are thorough, and not putting anyone unnecessarily at risk.

Remember, any problems that are identified during a pre- or post- operation inspection must be fixed before the vehicle goes back on the road.

Drive safe.



Appreciation events

A big thank you goes out to our Katherine and Edith Farms Volunteer Bushfire Brigades for their outstanding efforts during 2019. It's been a long dry and challenging fire season with significant fire events that has stretched resources in the area. We would like to thank both brigades for their support and thank the community for their spirit and generosity. Both Brigades received awards of recognition for their prolonged efforts and dedication during significant fire events under challenging circumstances.



Katherine and Edith Farms receiving their awards

Thank you to Kenny from Katherine for the delicious smoked snags, quite the treat!



The thanks continue!

A massive thank you to all our Top End brigades for all their legendary contributions throughout 2019, it was fantastic to see so many faces at this year's appreciation event in Berry Springs join in the celebrations. We couldn't be prouder to have such dedicated and selfless individuals who continue to support their community in what has been a long and challenging season. Well done!

This year's Perpetual Award winners:

- Best Planning Volunteer Bushfire Brigade - Dundee
- Best Mitigation Volunteer Bushfire Brigade - Lambells Lagoon
- Best Community Engagement Volunteer Bushfire Brigade - Darwin River
- Most Progressive Volunteer Bushfire Brigade - Labasheeda Park

An additional award for 2019 for outstanding support was awarded to the Livingstone Volunteer Bushfire Brigade for the continual support of their community, fellow brigades and Bushfires NT. Your efforts do not go unnoticed. Thank you.



Top End appreciation event

Cypress for Christmas

By Dr. Denise L. Goodfellow

On arriving in the Top End in 1975 I was amazed to see what looked like Christmas trees, growing around the Berry Springs area. These tropical cypress, *Callitris intratropica*, are endemic to northern Australia.

The trees are termite-resistant and so their wood has been used in the past for railway sleepers and construction (Handmer, 2017). These days they are also used to produce a blue essential oil.

Cypress are conifers, an ancient group of plants that have been around for about 300 million years. Now, however, this beautiful tree has declined in the Top End, not only from past over-harvesting but now because of destructive fire fuelled by gamba grass (Bowman, MacDermott, Nichols & Murphy, 2014). However, on our Darwin River property numbers of tropical cypress are increasing rapidly. One has grown up against a garage door, meaning we can't open it, while others have shot up under our power line. They need to go.

So, what better use than to sell these beautiful aromatic plants as Christmas trees, and donate the profits to our volunteer bushfire brigade here at Darwin River.

Prices are: pot plants \$10

1 metre \$30

\$1.8 metres \$50

3 metres \$75

Trees can be collected in December.

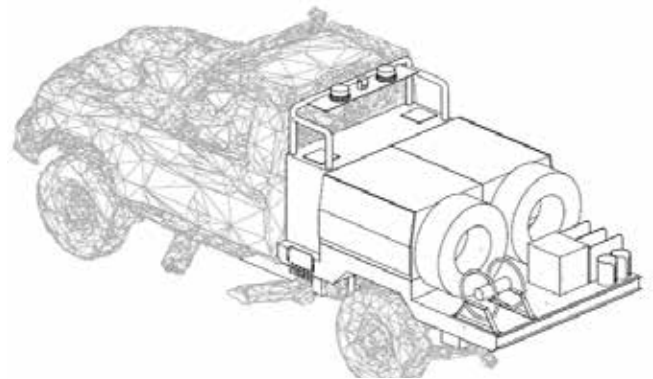
Ring 043 8650 835 or email goodfellow@bigpond.com.au for details.



Grass fire unit design goes to tender

Bushfires NT has been undertaking the design of a new grass fire unit. After consultation and initial feedback from both volunteers and staff, we are happy to announce that the design has been finalised and the tender for the build of the new grass fire units has been advertised.

Three prototype grass fire units will be built. These vehicles will be available across the volunteer network for trialling and use, and to provide feedback and comments to Bushfires NT. This feedback will be used to inform the final design of the grass fire units.



Santa in the Barkly

Tennant Creek Volunteer Bushfire Brigade

For 85 years now Tennant Creek has come together to celebrate the festive season at the annual Tennant Creek Children's Christmas Tree event. This is a highly regarded and important event that brings the community together each year in a festive spirit. The success of these types of activities is not possible without the support of the community and time given by volunteers.

Thank you to our Tennant Creek Volunteer Bushfire Brigade who helped make the event a whole lot of fun, along with special thanks to Maree Quinn who is now known as the Chupa Chup lady after handing out 1,000 Chupa Chups to all the kids. Hats off to our Tennant Creek brigade members for their spirit and support of their community.



Proud achievements

Our Berry Springs Volunteer Bushfire Brigade ought to be very proud of their achievements and how far they've come over the past few years. The last year in particular has seen the brigade accomplish an impressive new headquarter facility and refurbishment of their existing training room. Projects completed by dedicated volunteer members who give up their personal time for their community.

Special thanks goes to the many local businesses and community members for their ongoing and kind support.

Well done to all who contributed and thank you to the Northern Territory Government Community Benefit Fund for funding such an important community resource for the Berry Springs community.

Lifetime of support

Berry Springs celebrations over the weekend also included lifetime memberships awarded to:

- Roy Warde
- Douglas Barden
- Russel Anderson
- Ida Anderson
- Noel Swan
- Stevie Swan
- Edna O'Hehir

Each and every one of these members have given up countless hours over many, many years for the brigade and their community. Such generosity is what keeps a brigade together and provides the 'backbone' for a brigade to grow. Your support and community spirit has been outstanding. THANK YOU!

Quote from Edna O'Hehir - 'No matter how old you are you can still do something'

Christmas Shut down

From the team at Bushfires NT, thank you to everyone who has contributed in 2019. We would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year!

Bushfires NT offices will be closed from Wednesday 25 December 2019 and reopen Thursday 2 January 2020.

However we will continue to maintain a duty officer role to ensure we continue to support brigades and landowners.

