

LOWER BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 1976

Spring is here, and once again the thoughts of many people turn to bushfires.

Fire is a particular problem for those of us who are interested in the conservation of our bushland environment. There is no doubt that fire plays a part in the natural scheme of things, and that many of our native species are adapted to its occurrence. It is also clear that burning too frequently or burning at the wrong time destroys the native vegetation and encourages the growth of grasses and weeds which then become a greater fire hazard. The problem is to find a compromise between providing reasonable protection to town residents without destroying the natural environment we have at present.

It seems likely that burning should not be carried out more frequently than at 5 to 7 year intervals. Even then there is some evidence that such prescribed burnings only reduce the hazard temporarily. These burns sometimes get out of control and cause more damage than if nothing was done.

Some brigades are now taking a different tack by clearing trails from which a back-burn could be lit should a major fire threaten.

There are certain things that we all can do to reduce the danger to ourselves and our property:

Protection of Homes

The chances of a house surviving a fire depend more on the nature of its surroundings and the details of its construction than on the actual materials used. Provided certain precautions are taken, timber-framed houses can be just as safe as brick ones. Most houses are destroyed by burning leaves and debris getting through open doors, windows, under the floors and in the roofs. Here they start fires and burn unnoticed until it is too late and the whole house goes up.

To combat this:

- .Fit fly wire screens to windows, doors and ventilators.
- .Box-in open eaves or cover with fine wire mesh.
- .Board up the area below floors in timber houses.
- .Use woven wire vents for under-floor ventilation.
- .Seal the flute spaces at the fascia board on corrugated iron roofs with fibro cement or mortar.

In short, ensure that sparks and burning debris cannot enter the house. As far as the house surrounds are concerned:

- .Keep trees and shrubs clear of the walls, and gutters free from leaves and other debris.
- .Place woodheaps well clear of the walls or in properly constructed sheds.
- .Clean up long dry grass.
- .Burn or remove all inflammable rubbish.
- .Keep lawns and gardens tidy and well watered.

Shelter belts or even large trees are useful in deflecting wind-borne burning debris. It is important to plant trees clear of the house and to control the amount of growth below the trees. Stone walls are also effective and have the advantage that they will not burn.

Householders should also see to the need for:

- .Hoses that can reach around the house.
- .Sand or water buckets, knapsack spray or fire extinguisher. A simple, inexpensive emergency extinguisher can be made by mixing equal parts of bicarbonate of soda and fine clean sand. Store in tins and keep dry.
- .Safe storage places for inflammable liquids.
- .The safety of electrical appliances and wiring.
- .Matches etc. to be kept away from children.

If Fire Comes

When a fire approaches your property

DO NOT PANIC. Families living in fire-prone areas should plan and rehearse their fire emergency procedure - what is to be done, who is to do it, etc. This will help to avert panic.

DO NOT Use the telephone for other than one or two very brief messages.

DO NOT Pack the children into the car and evacuate without thinking - this can be very dangerous.

DO

1. Keep calm, act systematically.
2. Find out if possible the location of other people and what they intend doing.
3. See that everybody is properly dressed - long trousers or slacks, long-sleeved shirt, stout boots. Avoid synthetics, and dress in wool or stout cotton.
4. Close all doors and windows and block opening with wet towels.
5. Remove all exterior canvas awnings and blinds (or roll up and keep wet).
6. Place a ladder at the manhole leading to the interior of the roof and place a bucket of water in the ceiling.
7. Check water supplies and connect hoses to taps. Have buckets of water and a hand pump handy if available.
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8. If water supplies are ample, douse woodheap and other heavy fuel hazards.
9. Plug downpipes with tennis balls or cans wrapped in rags and fill gutters with water.
10. Let dogs off chains.
11. Have the stove going and be prepared to make a pot of tea.
12. If necessary, seek refuge in the house (provided reasonable attention has been given to the home protection aspects) or seek refuge in a stationary closed car placed on a completely clear open space, such as a green lawn. Place blankets for protection from radiant heat, and first-aid kit in car. The fire will have passed within 5 or 10 minutes and it will then be safe to walk on the "black".

After the main fire has passed:

Watch and patrol continuously for at least 30 minutes for sparks and small fires.

Extinguish with knapsack, hand pump or garden hose.

Watch for small fires which may have entered between ceiling and roof.

NORTONS BASIN

The National Trust have now taken an interest in the area of Norton's Basin and are very concerned at the developments occurring there (details reported in the last Newsletter). We hope that with this added weight we can have these developments stopped and the Basin preserved and properly managed. We will be following through with this project.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service propose to incorporate the adjacent "Nepean National Park" (actually Council owned open space land) into the Blue Mountains National Park. We hope that Norton's Basin can be included also.

BLUE MOUNTAINS PLANNING

At our August meeting, Mr. L. Paish of the B.M.C.C. gave an interesting talk on planning the future of the Blue Mountains.

With grants from the previous Australian Government, a number of people with different professional qualifications were employed by Council to study the Mountains in detail. From these studies, a number of working plans and guidelines have now been prepared and are available at the B.M.C.C. Branch Libraries. These documents provide a wealth of detailed information, too much to digest readily, but should provide a good basis for future detailed planning.

BLUE MOUNTAINS PLANNING (CONT.)

In addition to having these planning guidelines, Council has adopted and published a "Statement of Objectives" - only the second Local Government body in N.S.W. to do so. Four objectives are stated, which briefly are:

1. Management - coordinate decision making and planning
2. Conservation - protect the natural character of the Mountains, a vital part of the National Heritage.
3. Commercial Development - create more job opportunities without causing conflict between the various forms of traffic.
4. Living Areas - achieve a high quality of residential environment.

Each of these objectives is divided into three or more specific policies, and in turn the policies each have a number of detailed action steps to be carried out to achieve the policies.

It is good to see Council adopting such a positive set of guidelines. However, it will still be up to each and every one of us to keep alert and see that Council sticks to the spirit of the objectives to achieve the desired results.

COMING EVENTS

Friday October 8 - Meeting, Glenbrook Primary School, Cnr. Woodville and Peel Streets.

Movie and still films on our environment will be shown. These films are from the N.S.W. Education Department, and we are inviting children from the school and their parents to attend. Other children or their parents are welcome to attend.

NOTE: The films will start at 7.30 pm and the business section will be held afterwards.

Sunday November 14 - (Not Friday) Meeting held in the open at Mulgoa.

This meeting will be a special trip to inspect some of the historical features of the Mulgoa area. Mr. Arthur Downes of Mulgoa will be our guide.
