



WILDFIRE PREVENTION AND WEED MANAGEMENT ON ROAD RESERVES

POLICY

WILDFIRE PREVENTION AND WEED MANAGEMENT ON ROAD RESERVES

November 2014

Version 1.0

Owner: Department of Transport

Manager: Transport Infrastructure Planning Division

Background

The [Bushfires Act 2004](#) requires landholders of property throughout the Northern Territory rural area to undertake wildfire prevention activities to allow for the control and prevention of wildfires. The Department of Transport is a strategic landholder throughout the rural area and has a duty of care to neighboring properties to undertake some form of fire prevention activity commensurate with the risk.

Weeds are a threat to the bio diversity of native plant and animal species. Throughout the Territory, weeds are out competing native grasses, and with their pervasive nature are spreading into urban gardens, into creek and wetland areas, and anywhere the conditions suit. The major types of weeds found on roadside verges in the Top End are also a growing threat to fire safety, holding a fuel load three to five times greater than native grasses. Increasingly each year, the severity of late dry season wildfires is exacerbated by the expansion of these weeds throughout the rural area.

It is difficult to view the problem of weeds on road reserves in isolation from overall rural land management, although there are certain defining features. One of these is the unrestricted access all road users have to the road network, the very nature of this uncontrollability contributing to problems with weeds. The other aspect is road construction and management practices that may inadvertently assist in the spread of weeds. Despite these aspects peculiar to roadside weed management, the successful treatment and control of weeds requires the co-operation and co-ordination of all those involved in rural land management.

Objective

The Desired outcomes of the policy include:

1. The preservation of road reserves as natural corridors for plant and animal ecology.
2. A reduction in the risk of wildfire damage to properties adjoining the road reserve.
3. The control and management of weeds located on road reserves.

Guidelines

Policy Principles

The following are the major principles that underpin this policy:

1. Wildfire prevention and weed management are integrated land management issues.
2. Fire prevention and management strategies are a landholder responsibility.
3. The NT road network is not a regular landholding.
4. The Department of Transport has some duty of care to neighbouring properties and the community
5. The road reserve environment is an important habitat for flora and fauna.
6. The road environment is highly visible and influences tourist impressions of the Northern Territory.
7. The extent of preventative and management works needs to be in proportion to the consequences of the work, the known risk to adjacent landholders and resource availability.

General

The Department will develop fire and weed management plans in consultation with the appropriate government and community groups. These management plans will be specific to a land, catchment, regional and local area.

Weed and fire management plans will not be effective unless the community is involved in their development and implementation. Where uncoordinated control efforts, or lack of cooperation from other government agencies and adjacent landholders compromises policy outcomes, including cost to government, the extent of control effort will reflect this priority.

Wildfire Prevention and Management

Wildfire prevention and management activities on NT Government controlled road reserves may comprise the following:

Preventative Burning

- Preventative burning is burning of vegetation in the early dry season or in the wet season to prevent hot and severe fires in the late dry season;
- preventative burning should be used minimally, only in areas of high risk;
- preventative burning should occur on road reserves only where the adjacent landholder has pasture or produce in the adjacent paddock, risk of wildfire is high, and the landholder cannot undertake appropriate preventative measures;
- where the adjacent landholding can undertake preventative burning, then the road reserve should not be burnt;
- preventative burning should always be carried out in the late wet season / early dry season and at the cooler part of the day, ensuring an ensuing 'cool' fire;
- preventative burning should not be carried out on major tourist drives unless the risk is deemed too great for an alternative;
- areas suitable for wet season burning will be identified and preventative burning undertaken on the basis that dry season burning will not be required. Weed management may be necessary where wet season burning has occurred to ensure weed growth does not accelerate in the absence of native grasses;
- persons undertaking preventative works should employ appropriate traffic management measures; and
- preventative burning operations are not to compromise erosion and drainage controls.

Fire Breaks

- Fire breaks are not to be constructed on Department road reserves unless considered essential under a fire and weed management plan.

Slashing

- The Department will grass cut along the physical road corridor to a distance of 10m on major highways and arterial roads (where possible); and
- other Department roads in the Territory will be slashed where this is possible and necessary.

Weed Management

The Department will undertake appropriate weed management on NT Government road reserves in coordination with community and government efforts.

Weed control is the focus of the Department's weed management efforts. Weed eradication is a desirable outcome of weed management but may not be possible due to levels and location of infestation coupled with resource constraints.

Priorities will be identified on the basis of threats to the surrounding bio diversity, contribution to fire hazard and movement of weeds along road corridors into weed free districts.

Undeclared Problem Plants

Plants considered a problem in road reserves but not declared as 'noxious' will be managed using the following guidelines:

- where the plant is of significant community concern, either as a threat to bio diversity or a fire risk, the plant will be treated as a weed;
- where the specified plant is legitimately being propagated in a particular catchment / land area, the plant will not be treated as a weed unless controls exist on the specified landholdings; and
- where no controls exist, treatment will be limited to controlling the spread of the plant into areas where no such use prevails.

Spread of Weeds

The spread of noxious / problem weeds will be minimised through the identification of catchment areas and weed free zones, to be adhered to by all contractors working on the road reserve.

Contractors working on the road reserve are not to use top soil, sand or other material contaminated with weed or weed seedlings. To assist in preventing the introduction of new pest species, any top soil, sand and other material that is used, should be sourced from within the Northern Territory for preference.

All contracts relating to the road reserve will include specifications regarding weed management. These specifications will include clauses pertaining to weed hygiene practices (including wash downs and covering of loose loads), the reporting of weed types and locations, and minimal environmental disturbance.

Revegetation, borrow pit inspections and rehabilitation and minimal environmental disturbances are integral concepts for weed management. Adherence to Government standards on these issues is expected.

Fire Management and Weed Control

Weed control may be necessary in conjunction with fire control operations. Consultation with relevant agencies responsible for adjoining landholders will occur to ensure implementation of a coordinated weed and fire control regime.

Reporting of Weed Infestation

Identification of weeds will be the responsibility of Department employees supervising contractors, as well as the contractors themselves.

Departmental contractors and supervisors will be required to report weed information to ensure the weed information base is current.