

2023

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

TENTH ASSEMBLY

**Bushfire Preparedness
Assembly Resolution of 1 November 2023
Government Update**

**Presented by
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Minister for Planning and Land Management
November 2023**

Bushfire preparedness is a high priority of the ACT Government and maintaining the state of fire trails in Namadgi National Park.

The government continues to do everything it can, in partnership with the community, to prepare the ACT for the coming fire season. Significant work has already been undertaken in the last twelve months to repair and maintain these fire trails as the wet conditions have eased around the Canberra urban area; and more recently in the case of Namadgi National Park.

Namadgi National Park has experienced very wet conditions since the Black Summer Bushfires of 2019-20. The Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) were not able to bring road repair machinery into the higher elevations like the Cotter Hut area until approximately six weeks ago.

The Orroral Valley fire reduced the vegetation cover and the landscape's capacity to absorb water. After three years of rain supercharged the stream and creek crossings, the scale of repair and maintenance tasks is no surprise.

The weather conditions that have been witnessed over the past three years are unprecedented. Sadly, all indications are that severe weather events will be more frequent and intense and the pressure on our infrastructure will increase.

Balancing Repairs and Risks of Environmental Harm

As the government progresses larger scale repairs throughout Namadgi, particularly in the Upper Cotter catchment and Bimberi Wilderness, it is vital that risks to the environment are managed.

This landscape is fragile and care must be taken to manage the impact of plant and machinery. While PCS officers may require the opportunity to accelerate works in an emergency, it is important that a measured approach is taken in the implementation of planned works to minimise environmental impacts.

The government has already accelerated repair works across Namadgi and the ACT more broadly. As part of these repairs, the government is planning for a more resilient network through a review of our strategic trail network, upgrading our standards and technical guidelines, and strengthening asset management systems.

Undertaking Repairs

PCS is currently completing a strategic review of the ACT's management (fire) trail network. This review is examining the standards and classifications of the network that considers topographical, construction and financial constraints alongside best-practice suppression measures and requisite environmental values. The outcome sought is the most appropriate future fire trail network across the PCS estate that balances all our objectives and constraints.

Repairs already completed, will allow plant and equipment access to install permanent, more resilient creek crossings that can withstand flood events far more effectively than what was in place before the 2020 fires. This is the "build back better" ethos that is driving the PCS planning and on-ground delivery of this important work.

These repairs and more extensive resilience improvements on Namadgi management trails will be implemented in 2024 and beyond using Australian Government funding through the Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Program and ACT post-flood insurance funding. It is important to note that these works are carefully planned and prioritised to ensure the highest risks are managed first. Like all jurisdictions, the ACT must take such an approach to manage within the available resources, contractor and industry capacity and ensure all required environmental and safety standards are met.

Access

As of 21 November 2023, all Namadgi management trails are accessible to emergency and land management vehicles with the exception of the northern end of the Naas Valley Fire Trail, Left Hand Creek Fire Trail and the Clear Range Fire Trail north of Mt Clear. Each of these trails are a high priority for repair but can be made accessible to tankers by the first attack dozer in the event of a fire.

In relation to rapid access to remote locations in the Bimberi Wilderness Area, it is confirmed that four-wheel drive access to the Bimberi Wilderness Area for emergency and land management purposes was reinstated in mid-November 2023.

Articulated float vehicles can access the southern Namadgi/Upper Cotter region as far as the Orroral Valley to the north and Ginini gate on Mount Franklin Road from the west. Four-wheel drive fire appliances are then able to access the Bimberi Wilderness via Cotter Hut Road from both directions. Works will continue through the summer of 2023-24 to return permanent rigid float accessibility through the Bimberi Wilderness.

Works to repair and maintain management trails in other parts of Namadgi are underway, noting the variability of local constraints. Priorities include Naas Valley, Left Hand Creek and Clear Range Fire Trails. Each fire trail can be made accessible to tankers by the first attack dozer in the event of a fire.

There is always a risk that should further adverse weather events like storms or bushfires occur these have the potential to impact the ability of PCS to complete this work and may cause a reprioritisation of effort. Such events are a strong possibility in the coming summer storm season.

Management trail networks across south-eastern Australia have been severely impacted by the unprecedented alignment of the 2019-20 bushfire season, three extremely wet subsequent years and COVID-19 restrictions. Reinstatement of a resilient fire trail network able to withstand more intense climate driven events will take several years. However, in the meantime, access for emergency and land management purposes will remain the highest priority for resource allocation.

Assembly Reporting and Summary

A further report to the Assembly on progress in reinstating the Namadgi National Park fire trail network will be provided by 31 October and 30 April of each year until the works are complete.

The reports will address progress against the works program for Namadgi and provide an overview of any challenges to delivery which will provide assurance to the Assembly and the ACT community that we are well prepared for the fire season ahead.

The impacts on the fire trail network are a confronting reminder of the impacts of climate change. It is clear that what has worked in the past will not always work in

the future. ACT is planning for a more resilient fire trail network that can respond to the pressures that more frequent and intense events will create.