BUSHFIRE PREPARATION AND PROTECTED VEGETATION

Brisbane City Council's *Natural Assets Local Law 2003* (NALL) helps to protect our city's natural assets, including bushland areas, wetlands, waterway corridors and trees. Whilst many of us enjoy living in bushland areas, it is important to recognise the importance of being prepared for bushfire season and being mindful of the role fire plays in the environment.

This factsheet is intended to help guide you through situations where you may require a NALL permit application, whether you will require further documentation to accompany your application, or whether exemptions are in place that will allow you to undertake works without a permit.

Vegetation clearing for fire management/essential management that may be considered exempted activity under the Queensland State Government *Planning Regulation 2017* may still require approval under NALL. If you are uncertain please contact Council on 3403 8888 to discuss prior to undertaking clearing works.

The Queensland Fire and Emergency Service (QRES) recommends a number of actions to prepare for bushfire season including:

- Reducing vegetation loads along access paths.
- Mowing your grass regularly.
- Removing excess ground fuels and combustible material (long dry grass, dead leaves and branches).
- Trimming low-lying branches two metres from the ground surrounding your home.

Many of these activities can be carried out without a permit. In addition, property wide weed management will help to reduce fuel loads and does not require a permit (find out more below).

Remember, vegetation management is only one part of bushfire preparedness, and embers from bushland areas can travel for hundreds of meters ahead of a fire. In 'catastrophic' fire danger conditions, even well-prepared and well-constructed homes will not be safe and leaving early is the only option for your survival. If you live in a bushfire prone area you are strongly encouraged to compile a Bushfire Survival Plan. Visit the QFES at www.qfes.qld.gov.au for guidance on developing a Bushfire Survival Plan.

Weed management

Invasive pest plants, if left unmanaged, can rapidly increase fuel loads. Fast growing introduced grasses, dense woody weeds and climbing invasive vines all help to increase elevated fuel loads, and create a 'laddering' effect that allows fires to increase in intensity and rate of spread, as well as allowing fire to spread from the ground into the canopy of trees.

You do not need a permit to manage pest plants, and in many instances, management of weed species can significantly reduce bushfire risk to you and to neighbouring properties. You must be mindful when managing pest plants that you do not impact protected vegetation or disturb soil in a way that could cause erosion.

Council's Environmental Management Team have experts in protected vegetation and pest plants who can help guide with protected vegetation queries. You can contact Council on (07) 3403 8888 and ask for permit advice from a member of Council's Environmental Management Team. Arranging a visit to your property with a Bushfire Safety Officer from QRFS is also recommended.

If you are handy with plant identification, or you know someone who is, you can start to identify pest plants on your property. Pest plants are those invasive plants listed in the 'Biosecurity Plan for Brisbane'. Council also provides an online weed identification tool. To access these resources visit www.brisbane.qld.gov.au and search for 'weed identification tool' or 'biosecurity plan'. It is also important to remember that in Queensland, the State Government's *Biosecurity Act 2014* includes a 'general biosecurity obligation', which is a requirement for all landowners and managers to take all reasonable steps to manage invasive pest plants on land under their control.

Constructing new dwellings in 'Bushfire-prone Areas'

In Queensland, the *Australian Standard for the Construction of Buildings in Bushfire-prone Areas AS3959* (2018) covers the bushfire safety requirements of building in a bushfire prone area, as well as providing the methodology for calculating your Bushfire Attack Level (BAL). If you are proposing to remove protected vegetation for fire management in association with a new build, you will be required to submit a BAL assessment and recommendations with your NALL application. This report can be obtained from qualified consultants and may also be required as part of the certification process for your build.

Vegetation management and property development

Vegetation clearing associated with development in most bushland areas of Brisbane must demonstrate that proposed development works will protect Brisbane's biodiversity network and comply with Brisbane City Plan 2014. There are a number of ways to gain advice about planning and development in Brisbane. Find out more here.

If your property is identified in the City Plan Bushfire Overlay, or the SPP Bushfire Prone Area and you are proposing assessable development under the Bushfire Overlay, a Bushfire Hazard Assessment will be required to assist in demonstrating compliance with the Bushfire Overlay Code.

Pruning protected vegetation for fire management

Pruning can be useful to help reduce fuel loads along access paths, to trim lower branches to help prevent fire entering tree canopies, and to prevent tree canopies from overhanging dwellings. Depending on the type of vegetation protection on your property, you generally won't require a permit to undertake pruning works. To find out if your property has protected vegetation, and what categories are present on your property, you can request a map and report online or contact Council. Once you know what type of vegetation protection categories are on your property, you can use the tables below to see whether you need a permit. Most properties in bushland areas will be protected under the SNV and WWV categories (explained below).

Proposed Work	Protection categories present*	Is a permit required?
Pruning or trimming vegetation for the purpose of maintenance or hazard management on your property.	**WWV** **SNV** **SUV** (except significant landscape trees)	**A permit is not required** to prune if: • no more than 20% of the live foliage volume of a tree or shrub is removed in any 12month period; and • the part removed is distributed evenly over the whole crown and the tree or shrub is not left lop-sided **Dead limbs** may be removed without a permit so long as they are less than 20cm diameter and not providing habitat. Pruning means maintenance or remedial pruning in accordance with AS 4373-2007 Pruning of amenity trees.
	Significant landscape trees	**A permit is required**
WWV (Wetland and waterway vegetation) *SNV (Significant Native Vegetation)* *SUV (Significant Urban Vegetation)* Find out more about protected vegetation categories.		

Removing protected vegetation

Some exemptions exist to remove protected vegetation in close proximity to dwellings. There are also exemptions to remove dead trees smaller than 20cm in trunk diameter that are not providing habitat. In most cases, a permit application will be required if you are planning to remove protected vegetation. Exemptions are described below. Most properties in bushland areas will be protected under the SNV and WWV categories.

Proposed Work	Protection categories present*	Is a permit required?
Removing a tree or part of a tree from around occupied dwellings and buildings	**WWV** **SNV** **SUV** (except significant landscape trees)	**A permit is not required** to remove a tree or part of a tree if: • the whole trunk is located within 3m of an existing lawfully constructed and occupied dwelling on a property less than or equal to 4000m^2 in area. • the whole trunk is located within 6m of an existing lawfully constructed and occupied dwelling on a property greater than 4000m^2 in area.
	Significant landscape trees	**A permit is required**
Removing a dead tree	**WWV** **SNV** **SUV** (except significant landscape trees)	Dead trees may be removed without a permit if the tree is— (i) **smaller than 20cm in trunk diameter**; and (ii) is not providing habitat for native fauna;
	Significant landscape trees	**A permit is required**
Clear a firebreak	WWV SNV SUV	**A permit is required** unless the clearing is in accordance with a written (or oral, in emergency circumstances) direction to clear a firebreak given by a Fire Warden, the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services.
WWV (Wetland and waterway vegetation) *SNV (Significant Native Vegetation)* *SUV (Significant Urban Vegetation)* *Find out more about protected vegetation categories.*		

A permit application will be required for the following activities:

- Removing protected vegetation around dwellings that does not fall under an exemption under NALL.
- Managing native undergrowth (shrubs other than weeds) within fuel reduced areas.
- Carrying out prescribed burns and installing fire access lines (see more information about fire management below).
- Installing fire breaks (unless directed to do so by QFES).
- Removing vegetation, other than weed species, on overgrown fire management trails.

A bushfire management plan may be required to be submitted with a permit application for these activities. The Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES), or other suitably qualified bushfire professional, can provide advice about the suitable location of firebreaks and fire management lines. Arranging a visit to your property with a Bushfire Safety Officer from QRES can be highly beneficial when considering vegetation management.

Fire management

Lighting a fire

The use of outdoor fires for burning green waste piles is regulated under Council's *Health, Safety and Amenity Local Law 2021*. Limited exemptions exist for burning waste in fire piles of less than 2m (length) x 2m (breadth) x 2m (height) if you live in an area zoned as Rural. If you plan to burn green waste in a Rural zoned area, you must ensure that it is located away from any protected vegetation, as fire piles can generate intense heat that can kill protected trees.

Prescribed burning

Whilst Council is supportive of prescribed burning for hazard reduction and vegetation management in bushland areas, a number of factors need to be satisfied before property owners undertake fire management. Applying for a permit is just one of the steps required. Consider the following tips before starting work.

- The South East Queensland Fire and Biodiversity Consortium (www.fireandbiodiversity.org.au) provides information and materials to assists in fire management planning, including a property bushfire planning kit.
- Apply for a permit to carry out works under NALL. A proposed burn plan must be included with an 'Application to Carry Out Works to (including interfere with) Protected Vegetation – long term permit'. Permits of up to 10 years, for ongoing work, are available.
- Apply for a 'Permit to Light Fire' through your local fire warden.
- Council's approved NALL permit can be provided to support your 'Permit to Light Fire' application.
- Following permission from QFRS, advise Council of your intent to undertake a controlled burn.
- It is also recommended that property owners talk to their neighbours about the intended work. You might also consider joint applications.

How to apply for a permit

Permits can be lodged with Council online or by mail, email or in person. For permit forms and more information visit www.brisbane.qld.gov.au and search 'protected vegetation permits', call (07) 3403 8888 or visit your nearest Council regional business centre.

Further information

For more information, visit www.brisbane.qld.gov.au or phone Council on (07) 3403 8888.

Visit the Queensland Fire and Emergency Service (QFES) www.qfes.qld.gov.au to find out more about preparing for fire season.

Brisbane City Council Information

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