

**Wingecarribee Shire Council**

**Fire Management Plan**

For

**Gibbergunyah Reserve**

May 2004

# **Fire Management Plan**

For

## **Gibbergunyah Reserve**

May 2004

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## **TERMINOLOGY**

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

The bushfire terminology used in this plan can mean different things to different people. A glossary of key terms has been included at the end of this fire management plan.

## Summary

This fire management plan for Gibbergunyah Reserve has been prepared for Wingecarribee Shire Council by AVK Environmental Management and Renaissance Forestry. The plan is compatible with the *Wingecarribee Bushfire Risk Management Plan*, and will ensure that Wingecarribee Shire Council is able to meet its responsibilities under current legislation.

Gibbergunyah Reserve has an area of approximately 186 ha located on a broad ridge between Bowral and Mittagong and is managed by Wingecarribee Shire Council with the assistance of the Gibbergunyah Reserve Management Committee. To ensure that management boundaries are practical and ecologically viable, they have been extended beyond the formal boundaries of Gibbergunyah Reserve, where required, to provide the most practical boundaries for management burning and fire suppression.

Wingecarribee Shire Council and landowners surrounding the reserve have a general legal responsibility to take all reasonable steps to minimise the risk of fires that originate on their property causing personal injury, damage to adjoining property, or damage to items of natural or heritage value protected by government legislation. Wingecarribee Shire Council also has specific responsibilities under various Acts of Parliament for fire management, fire hazard abatement, and the conservation and management of native flora and fauna.

Wingecarribee Shire Council does not currently have a bushfire management policy or strategy. The following draft policy has been developed for Council's consideration to provide a framework for this and other fire management plans.

Wingecarribee Shire Council will diligently exercise all its legislative responsibilities relating to fire management.

Wingecarribee Shire Council will implement current 'Best Management Practice' in fire management on all land under its control in order to fulfil its responsibilities as a landowner, and in recognition of its role in natural area management.

Fire management on property owned, or managed, by Wingecarribee Shire Council will be based on sound ecological principles, and will take into account the objectives and principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development.

Wingecarribee Shire Council recognises the importance of regular communication between fire management agencies, landowners, and the community at large, in raising awareness of fire management issues and ensuring broad understanding of the responsibilities of different sections of the community in reducing the risk of dangerous bushfires.

The last major wildfire to affect the reserve was in 1939. There have been a number of small fires since that time, either deliberately lit or from lightning strikes, but these have all been quickly suppressed and caused minimal damage. The only recent extensive fires in the reserve have been hazard reduction burns.

It will not be possible to prevent wildfires occurring within Gibbergunyah Reserve. Currently, fuel loads over most of the reserve are sufficient to generate uncontrollable crown fires on days of high to extreme fire danger. Unless fires in the reserve are suppressed when small and accessible (close to trails), there is a risk that large destructive fires may develop. Depending on weather conditions, such fires may burn a substantial area of the reserve causing damage to assets and environmental values, and even loss of life. These fires may also travel onto adjoining lands, further threatening life and property. The reserve also provides the link that could allow major fires to move from the Greater Mount Alexandra Reserve to the Mt Gibraltar Reserve and bushland further to the east. This plan aims to lessen these risks by minimising the risk of fires starting in the reserve, and minimising the risk of loss of life or damage to assets in and around the reserve.

Natural heritage assets include native flora and fauna, as well as scenic values. No threatened plant species have been recorded in the reserve, however three threatened fauna species, Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*), Glossy Black-Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus lathami*), and the Yellow-bellied Glider (*Petaurus australi*), have been recorded within the reserve.

Wildfires can pose a risk to fauna habitats and fire sensitive vegetation in Gibbergunyah Reserve as burning of large areas in one high intensity fire event could remove species, and even whole plant communities, from the area. Extensive, frequent, and indiscriminate hazard reduction burning can have a similar effect. The potential risks to flora and fauna habitats from wildfire can be managed by minimising the risk of ignitions, maintaining adequate fire trails and other control lines, and by burning suitable areas of vegetation at different times to create a mosaic of vegetation units at different stages of recovery from fire. The approach taken in this fire management plan is to prescribe fire regimes that aim to conserve existing plant community distribution, structure and floristics, unless there is a legitimate reason to change the vegetation. Prescribed burns will be of low intensity to limit canopy scorch, and not so frequent as to prevent the existing tree cover regenerating.

No Aboriginal or cultural heritage sites likely to be at risk from fire have been identified in the reserve. There is also no infrastructure in the reserve that could be damaged by fire. The only built assets at risk from fire in the reserve are perimeter fencing and scattered facilities constructed for visitors including, signs, timber seats, plant species name tags etc. The main built assets at risk from fires in the reserve are the buildings and infrastructure in the residential and rural areas that



surround the reserve. The fire risk to surrounding property has been addressed by ensuring that there are sufficient Asset Protection Zones around dwellings, and that fire trails and hazard reduction burns are strategically located to provide the best opportunity of containing wildfires within the reserve.

To implement the management burning program the reserve has been divided into fire management units where burning will be used primarily for hazard management (strategic hazard management), or for habitat management (ecosystem management). These units also allow other management activities, such as weed control, to be co-ordinated with the burning program for maximum benefit. The strategic hazard management units will be burnt primarily to maintain relatively low fuel loads (less than 10 tonnes per hectare) to strengthen fire control lines (fire trails and asset protection zones). The ecosystem management units will be burnt at the optimal fire frequency for the vegetation in the unit.

There is an adequate fire trail system within the reserve and most trails are in excellent condition. There is no water for fire fighting in the reserve but supplies are easily accessible from dams on surrounding properties and hydrants in adjoining parts of Bowral and Mittagong.

A number of fire management objectives have been set for the reserve. These objectives, and the management actions recommended to achieve them, are summarised below. Some of the recommended actions have been referenced to a series of generic Management Procedures (MP) in the appendix to this plan.

	<b>Fire Management Objective</b>	<b>Recommended Actions</b>
1	Minimise the risk of wildfires starting in the reserve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) On total fire ban days, erect fire ban warning signs and consider closing the reserve in consultation with the RFS Superintendent.</li> <li>b) Implement a community education program to request residents near the reserve to report any smoke or suspicious persons on days of total fire bans.</li> </ul>
2	Minimise the risk of fire to users of the reserve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Erect appropriate signs on tracks and roads to warn reserve users of management burns.</li> <li>b) Implement the recovery procedures in Management Procedure (MP) 13 following fires.</li> </ul>
3	Minimise the risk of wildfire damaging built and cultural heritage assets in and surrounding the reserve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Implement the fire protection measures listed in Table 2, including the establishment and maintenance of Asset Protection Zones.</li> <li>b) Ensure properties surrounding the reserve are inspected at the beginning of the bushfire danger period and Section 66 notices are issued as required.</li> <li>c) Ensure that authorities planning wildfire control operations in the reserve are aware of built and cultural heritage assets and ensure they are not damaged by machinery movement or other activities.</li> <li>d) Following fires implement the recovery procedures in MP 13.</li> </ul>

	<b>Fire Management Objective</b>	<b>Recommended Actions</b>
4	Minimise the impact of fire and fire management activities on water quality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Minimise the risk of wildfires starting and spreading.</li> <li>b) Maintain a minimum 5 m wide unburnt buffer along creeklines during management burning wherever possible.</li> <li>c) Implement the recovery procedures in MP 13 following fires.</li> <li>d) Do not spray fire fighting foams or retardants onto water courses during prescribed burning or wildfire suppression operations.</li> </ul>
5	Implement planning controls on new developments within and adjoining the reserve to ensure they incorporate adequate bushfire protection measures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) All new buildings in the reserve must be constructed in accordance with the relevant construction level in Australian Standard 3959 - 1999 Construction of Buildings in Bushfire Prone Areas.</li> <li>b) All new buildings in the reserve should be surrounded with an Asset Protection Zone as detailed in MP 5.</li> <li>c) All new developments within 100 m of the reserve boundary should meet the requirements of the RFS document Planning for Bushfire Protection.</li> </ul>
6	Maintain existing emergency vehicle access points and fire trails shown on Figure 5 in a trafficable condition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Carry out fire trail repairs and maintenance listed in Table 3.</li> <li>b) Ensure all fire trails shown on Figure 5 are inspected and maintained in a trafficable condition at all times according to MP 2.</li> <li>c) Negotiate a formal agreement with the owners of Lot 7 DP 734392, or Lot 6 DP 714867 to establish a vehicle access route across their property from the reserve to Boronia Street for emergency use.</li> </ul>
7	Minimise damage to the fire trail system by preventing unauthorised vehicle access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Implement a security lock system (keys that can't be copied without permission) to control access to fire trails in the reserve. Issue copies of the key to the NSW Fire Brigades, the Rural Fire Service and other emergency services. Each brigade to be provided with a key for each vehicle likely to be used to respond to a fire in the reserve.</li> <li>b) Inspect gates regularly to ensure that locks are in place and functioning.</li> </ul>
8	Signpost all fire trails at their access points, and at trail intersections.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Erect appropriate signage at all vehicle access points, and at fire trail intersections, to guide emergency service vehicles. Signs should include commonly used names and/or codes. Dead end trails should be marked as such on the signs.</li> <li>b) Consult with the Rural Fire Service on the most appropriate form and location for the signs.</li> </ul>
9	Close and rehabilitate all vehicle trails not designated as fire trails in Figure 5, and not required for other management purposes.	Rehabilitate any vehicle trails not designated as fire trails in Figure 5, and not required for other purposes, using the procedure in MP 3.
10	Construct any future foot tracks so as to maximise their use for fire management.	Locate any new foot tracks along the boundaries of fire management units wherever possible, and construct to MP 4.

	<b>Fire Management Objective</b>	<b>Recommended Actions</b>
11	Ensure an adequate and accessible water supply for fire fighting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Ensure fire hydrants on streets near the reserve are clearly marked, and maintained to Australian Standard AS 2419.1 – 1996 wherever possible.</li> <li>b) Encourage residents in areas with poor mains pressure to install stored water supplies for fire fighting that are accessible by fire brigade vehicles.</li> <li>c) All stored water supplies should be registered with the Stored Water Supply Program, and identified with special markers available from the NSW Fire Brigades.</li> <li>d) Ensure that gates providing emergency access to dams on adjoining properties are maintained.</li> </ul>
12	Apply the appropriate fire regime to populations of flora and fauna of conservation value in the reserve that require periodic fire for their long-term survival.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Consult with the NPWS Threatened Species Unit when planning prescribed burns in units containing populations or communities listed in the Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995.</li> <li>b) Avoid burning the whole of any population of a threatened or rare plant species in a single management burn.</li> <li>c) Monitor the recovery of any populations of threatened or rare flora and fauna burnt by wildfires or prescribed burns.</li> </ul>
13	Exclude fire from the simple rainforest (riparian) plant communities in the Mount Alexandra Reserve.	Do not burn the Shale Forest (PIP-GLB) around the summit of Ninety Acre Hill, for the duration of this plan.
14	Implement a mosaic burning program in selected forest plant communities to maintain and enhance existing habitat diversity, and reduce overall fuel loads in bushland areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Carry out prescribed burning according to the schedule in Table 5 using the procedure in MP 8.</li> <li>b) Regularly revise burning prescriptions to ensure they incorporate the most recent information on the fire ecology of flora, fauna and plant communities of conservation value in the reserve.</li> </ul>
15	Control of unwanted plant species through coordinating fire management and weed control activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Treat any weeds in areas to be burnt under this fire management plan according to MP 9.</li> <li>b) Coordinate fire management and weed management activities using the procedure in MP 10.</li> <li>c) Integrate the prescribed burning program and its associated weed control activities into any weed management program for the reserve.</li> <li>d) Ensure that all vehicles involved in fire management activities in the reserve (excluding emergencies) are washed to remove any mud, soil or plant material prior to entering the reserve, particularly vehicle underbodies, in order to control the spread of weeds and plant diseases. This is the responsibility of the owner of the vehicle.</li> </ul>
16	Coordination of fire management activities in the reserve amongst the various stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Implement the procedures for coordinating fire management activities in MP 10.</li> <li>b) Preparation of pre-fire season map updates and distribution to the NSW Fire Brigades and Rural Fire Service.</li> <li>c) Approach all landowners who have works or activities recommended on their land in this fire management plan and obtain their cooperation in implementing the relevant activities on their land.</li> <li>d) Units scheduled for burning should be inspected by representatives of Council, the reserve committee, and the person who will be in charge of the burn approximately 3 months prior to the burn to determine if the scheduling is suitable and if any works need to be carried out prior to the burn.</li> </ul>

	<b>Fire Management Objective</b>	<b>Recommended Actions</b>
17	Ensure all personnel carrying out fire management activities in the reserve are suitably trained and equipped.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Ensure all personnel engaged in prescribed burning activities in the reserve have the appropriate level of training and equipment as outlined in Section 6.4, and the minimum equipment listed in MP 8.</li> <li>b) Ensure all personnel engaged in fire management activities in the reserve, including fire trail maintenance, are provided with appropriate instruction in the recognition and protection of items of natural and cultural heritage value, or are supervised by a person with this knowledge.</li> </ul>
18	Develop community information and education programs for fire hazard management and bushfire protection.	Prepare an information sheet as outlined in Section 6.1 and Appendix F of this plan, and distribute to adjoining residents, reserve users and other interest groups.
19	Encourage the setting up of Community Fire Units in moderate and high risk urban areas adjoining the reserve.	Consider setting up a Community Fire Unit in the urban area of Bowral to the south of the reserve (NSW Fire Brigades).
20	Maintain up-to-date information on location of dwellings, fire trails and their condition, water supply points, Asset Protection Zones, and areas burnt in prescribed fires and wildfires.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Record fire management activities and wildfires using the procedures in MPs 11 and 12.</li> <li>b) Enter details of each management burn and wildfire in the Bushfire Risk Information Management System (BRIMS).</li> </ul>
21	Monitor the impact of fire management activities in the reserve. Adjust practices to achieve relevant objectives, and periodically review the fire management plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Monitoring of impacts of management fires as outlined in Section 6.5.</li> <li>b) Review this fire management plan at regular intervals using the procedures in Section 6.5.4. and Table 6.</li> <li>c) Regularly revise burning prescriptions to ensure they incorporate the most recent information on the fire ecology of flora, fauna and plant communities of conservation value in the reserve.</li> <li>d) Carry out further research on the impacts of fire on the reserve.</li> </ul>

The management actions in the plan cover a 15 year period with reviews recommended each 5 years. The plan also includes procedures to ensure that key components of the plan are continuously updated. The monitoring procedures in the plan allow for collection of the information required to make an informed review of the plan in line with the 'adaptive management' approach in the plan.

# 1. Introduction

This fire management plan for Gibbergunyah Reserve has been prepared for Wingecarribee Shire Council by AVK Environmental Management and Renaissance Forestry. This plan is designed to be a working document containing all the maps and information necessary for its immediate implementation. This fire management plan is compatible with the *Wingecarribee Bushfire Risk Management Plan*, and will ensure that Wingecarribee Shire Council is able to meet its responsibilities under current legislation.

The fire management plan considers private property adjacent to the reserve, and, where necessary, identifies works to reduce the threat to life and property in these areas. To ensure that the boundaries of fire management units are practical and ecologically viable, they have been extended beyond the formal boundaries of Gibbergunyah Reserve, where required, to provide the most practical boundaries for management burning and fire suppression. Currently there is no overall management plan for Gibbergunyah Reserve. This fire management plan covers all the environmental issues required for the issuing of a *Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code* certificate for the hazard reduction works recommended in the plan.

To help overcome the lack of information on the long-term responses of indigenous vegetation to fire, this fire management plan has adopted the principles of 'adaptive management'. The plan contains a monitoring and evaluation component which will provide the information required to progressively refine the plan to ensure it is achieving its desired outcomes. In view of this, the scheduling of management burning in the fire management plans covers a 15 year period. This will allow sufficient time to implement the recommendations in the plan, and to collect enough information for an informed assessment and review. However, the plan also includes procedures to ensure that key components of the plan are continuously updated.

## 1.1 Reserve Overview

Gibbergunyah Reserve has an area of approximately 186 ha located on a broad ridge between Bowral and Mittagong (Figure 1). Ninety Acre Hill (814 m) is the most prominent topographic feature in the area. The reserve forms the scenic background to both towns.

Gibbergunyah Reserve is managed by Wingecarribee Shire Council with the assistance of the Gibbergunyah Reserve Management Committee. There is also a "Friends of Gibbergunyah" group who support and assist the Management Committee in maintaining the reserve and providing facilities for visitors.

**Figure 1 - Location of Gibbergunyah Reserve**

### **1.1.1 Vegetation**

Details of the vegetation in the reserve are in the ecological investigation undertaken as part of this fire management plan by Kevin Mills and Associates (see Appendix E). The distribution of the plant communities in the reserve is shown in Figure 2. The vegetation in the reserve ranges from open forest/woodland on the drier ridges to tall moist forest in the deeper gullies and is typical of the sandstone ridges in the area.

There is no comprehensive plant list for Gibbergunyah Reserve. A plant species list was compiled from existing information and observations during fieldwork for this project (see Appendix E). A total of 100 native species and three exotic species are listed, but is by no means a comprehensive list for the reserve.

### **1.1.2 Reserve Usage**

Gibbergunyah Reserve is mostly bounded by farmland, but adjoins residential areas in Bowral to the south and Mittagong to the east. Some of the farmland and larger residential lots adjoining the reserve still have a partial native vegetation cover. Public access to the reserve is from the end of Howards Lane in the north, and a walking track through the Bowral Country Club from the south. Public usage of the reserve is limited to walking on the fire trails and foot tracks in the reserve. The two lookouts in the reserve, Ninety Acre Hill and Gib Lookout, provide destinations for many users.

'Rest areas' have been provided at a number of locations along the tracks and trails in the reserve but there are no picnic or cooking facilities. The reserve is not widely publicised, and usage is primarily by local residents.

Activities within the reserve that are of particular relevance to this fire management plan are:

- recreation activities that could result in people being injured by fires (eg, walking, picnicking)
- infrastructure that would be adversely affected by wildfire (fences, signs, rest areas)
- activities that can cause damage to fire trails (eg, four wheel drive vehicles and trail bikes)
- activities that increase the risk of fires starting (eg, camping, car dumping).

**Figure 2 – Vegetation in Gibbergunyah Reserve**



## 1.2 Aim

The aims of this fire management plan are to:

- “a) Provide recommendations for maintenance and operational procedures to minimise the fire threat to:
- life and property
  - ecological diversity
  - sustainability of natural systems
  - cultural and aboriginal values
  - threatened species
- b) Provide Council with recommendations on policy and best management practice for development of Fire Hazard Management Strategies.”

It must be noted that it will not be possible to prevent wildfires occurring within Gibbergunyah Reserve. Unless these fires are suppressed when small and accessible (close to trails), there is a risk that large destructive fires may develop. Depending on weather conditions, such fires may burn a substantial area of the reserve causing damage to assets and environmental values, and even loss of life. These fires may also travel onto adjoining lands, further threatening life and property. This plan aims to lessen these risks by minimising the risk of fires starting in the reserve, and minimising the risk of loss of life or damage to assets in and around the reserve. The works required to protect life and property in areas adjacent to the reserve will mostly need to be carried out on land adjoining the reserve, rather than within the reserve.

This plan also provides for the use of fire as a management tool to:

- reduce fire hazard to protect assets from wildfires
- maintain plant communities and individual species of conservation value within the reserve that require fire in order to ensure their long-term viability
- assist in the removal of weeds within the reserve and the regeneration of degraded bushland.

## 1.3 Structure of the Fire Management Plan

SECTION 1 of this plan covers the aim, scope and structure of the plan, current management responsibilities within the reserve, and the necessity and advantages of fire management planning.

SECTION 2 outlines the fire management responsibilities of Wingecarribee Shire Council and private landowners, and how they apply to fire management within and surrounding the reserve. This section also includes a fire management policy for consideration by Council, and broad fire management strategies.

SECTION 3 assesses the fire history of the reserve, causes of wildfires, and fire risk to built, cultural and natural heritage assets that may be at risk from fire.

SECTION 4 provides an overview of fire management issues in the reserve including current fire management practices and community concerns.

SECTION 5 states the fire management objectives for this plan, based on the overall aims of the plan and specific fire management issues.

SECTION 6 covers plan implementation, including prescribed burning, training, community awareness and involvement, and evaluation and review.

SECTION 7 outlines further research that could improve fire management in the reserve.

SECTION 8 summarises the management activities required to achieve the objectives of the plan in the form of an action table. This action table references the tables, maps and other parts of the plan needed for on-ground implementation. It should therefore be used as the primary document for implementing the plan.

In a separate appendix are a series of generic management procedures to assist in implementing the plan. This document also includes a methodology explaining the approach used in preparing the plan, assessment references and standards used in the plan, and fieldwork and consultation procedures. These details will be required when revising the plan.

Mapping of information relevant to fire suppression and fire hazard management has been done on a Geographic Information System (GIS). This will assist the Rural Fire Service and other emergency services during wildfire events. The GIS maps and data fields can be updated regularly so that emergency services operating within the reserve during a wildfire have access to the latest fire management information.

Use of a GIS system to record the basic information for the plan will allow it to be easily updated and revised. This is essential to the adaptive management approach used in this plan, as there will be a need to modify the plan in response to:

- new information on the fire ecology of the flora and fauna species in the reserve
- the results of implementation monitoring and performance evaluations
- unplanned incidents, such as major wildfires
- changes in Council and government policy affecting fire management in the reserve.

## 1.4 Fire Management

Wildfires are a threat to life and property, as well as to natural heritage and cultural assets. The wildfires in January 2001, and November 2002, showed the extent of the damage that can be caused by wildfires in Wingecarribee Shire. Fire has also been found to be a useful tool for managing native bushland reserves to maintain biodiversity.

### 1.4.1 Fire Hazard Reduction

As the intensity of a bushfire increases it becomes progressively more difficult to contain and suppress the fire. Very high intensity (> 4000 kW/m) fires with flame heights greater than 10 m are generally uncontrollable (NSW Rural Fire Service, 1997). The threat from a bushfire therefore increases as its intensity increases. Fire intensity is directly related to the quantity and distribution of fine fuel (live and dead plant matter less than 6 mm diameter) available to the fire. Other factors, such as slope and moisture content of the fuel, also influence fire intensity, but the only factor that can be effectively controlled to limit fire intensity is fine fuel load (usually expressed in tonnes per hectare).

The fire threat to infrastructure and built assets, such as dwellings, can be reduced by creating an Asset Protection Zone around the asset where fine fuel loads are maintained at low levels. Generally, these buffers consist of an Inner Protection Area (IPA) around the asset with minimal fine fuel loads, and an Outer Protection Zone (OPA) with reduced fine fuel loads. The purpose of the OPA is to reduce the intensity of any bushfire approaching an asset. The purpose of the IPA is to protect the asset from flame contact and intense radiant heat. Slashing, mowing, or hand cutting of vegetation are generally the most effective methods for establishing and maintaining small protection areas around isolated assets, or long, narrow, Asset Protection Zones along urban/bushland perimeters.

Protection of other assets and values, such as water quality, views, and threatened species, is generally more difficult, and requires strategies that minimise the risk of wildfires starting and spreading. The main strategies are to:

- minimise the risk of wildfires igniting by removing or limiting as many potential causes of fire as possible
- maximise the ability of fire suppression agencies to detect and control any wildfires that do start.

Maintaining fuel loads at a low level will limit the intensity and rate of spread of wildfires, and make it easier for fire brigades to control and suppress them. Prescribed burning is generally the most effective way to reduce fuel loads over relatively large areas, or where other methods of fuel management, such as slashing, are not feasible. However, there is always a risk of prescribed

burns escaping control lines and becoming destructive wildfires. In addition, some vegetation types accumulate fuel very rapidly and therefore require frequent burning to maintain fuel reduced conditions. Frequent burning can have adverse side effects, such as loss of plant communities and fauna habitat, increased erosion, and loss of visual amenity.

#### **1.4.2 Use of Fire in Sustainable Management of Bushland**

Inappropriate fire regimes (season, intensity and frequency of fires) can cause progressive and sometimes irreversible changes in indigenous plant communities, including a loss of biodiversity (the variety of life). On the other hand, identification, prescription and implementation of an appropriate fire regime can be used to:

- manage indigenous flora and fauna habitats in a sustainable manner
- maintain biodiversity
- control selected weed species and promote natural regeneration in dry forest communities.

Wildfires can pose a risk to fire sensitive vegetation in Gibbergunyah Reserve as burning of large areas in one high intensity fire event could remove species, and even whole plant communities, from the area. Extensive, frequent, and indiscriminate hazard reduction burning can have a similar effect. The potential risks to flora and fauna habitats from wildfire can be managed by minimising the risk of ignitions, maintaining adequate fire trails and other control lines, and by burning suitable areas of vegetation at different times to create a mosaic of vegetation units at different stages of recovery from fire. Adoption of a mosaic burning pattern would have the following advantages:

- increased habitat diversity
- reduced overall fuel loads
- help in the suppression of wildfires
- reduced risk of a single, high-intensity wildfire burning the whole of the area.

Within the mosaic of burning units the fire regime (frequency, season and intensity of fire) can be manipulated to achieve some or all of the following objectives:

- removal of woody and herbaceous weeds, and weed seeds from mid-storey, leaf litter, and soil surface
- reduction in the levels of plant nutrients, such as phosphorus and nitrogen, which may be contributing to weed invasion
- manipulation of ecological processes such as; species composition (via the promotion of selected species or communities), regeneration of senescent vegetation, and the creation of suitable conditions for native seed germination

- protection of species of conservation value by maintaining habitat elements that are critical for their survival.

In bushland fire can be used to stimulate germination of indigenous plant seeds. She-oaks, most Eucalypts, Acacias, members of the pea family (*Fabaceae*) and many species from other families frequently germinate prolifically in areas which have been burnt. However, the burnt area will also be open to weed invasion and must be carefully monitored.

In rural areas frequent burning is sometimes used to control woody weeds, and this method can also be helpful in native grasslands. However, in native bushland fire will generally increase an existing weed problem. Many woody weeds re-sprout rapidly from rootstock after fire, often coppicing densely (hawthorn, gorse). Herbaceous species (including many grasses) respond in a similar way, regenerating from growth buds on a network of robust underground rhizomes (pampas grass). Seed germination is usually prolific after fire, a response which necessitates prompt control measures, on-going monitoring, and site maintenance (gorse, broom).

Therefore, where weeds are already a problem, prescribed burning should only be carried out after weeds have been treated, and follow up weed control can be carried out. In general, weed infested bushland areas should not be burnt if resources for post-fire weeding are not available. The exception to this is high fire hazard areas close to dwellings where burning is the only feasible method of hazard reduction.

## 2. Fire Management Framework

### 2.1 Fire Management Policy and Strategies

Wingecarribee Shire Council does not currently have a bushfire management policy or strategy. The following draft policy has been developed to provide a framework for this and other fire management plans. It has not been formally adopted by Council.

Wingecarribee Shire Council will diligently exercise all its legislative responsibilities relating to fire management.

Wingecarribee Shire Council will implement current 'Best Management Practice' in fire management on all land under its control in order to fulfil its responsibilities as a landowner, and in recognition of its role in natural area management.

Fire management on property owned, or managed, by Wingecarribee Shire Council will be based on sound ecological principles, and will take into account the objectives and principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development.

Wingecarribee Shire Council recognises the importance of regular communication between fire management agencies, landowners, and the community at large, in raising awareness of fire management issues and ensuring broad understanding of the responsibilities of different sections of the community in reducing the risk of dangerous bushfires.

The recommended strategies for implementing this draft fire management policy are:

1. Maintain up to date maps of bushfire prone areas within the shire to provide a basis for planning, and to ensure that development and building applications incorporate fire protection measures appropriate to the level of bushfire risk.
2. Preparation of detailed fire management plans for all bushland areas under Council's control which include provisions for the protection of life and property, fire hazard reduction, protection of threatened species and their habitats, and conservation of biodiversity.
3. Facilitate control and suppression of wildfires on Council property through provision of adequate resources for the construction, inspection and maintenance of fire trails, fire breaks, water supply points, and asset protection zones.
4. Develop and maintain a fire management data base for recording and monitoring fire history, fire hazard levels, vegetation condition, and fire management actions.
5. Monitoring of Council managed bushland areas during periods of high and extreme fire danger to quickly detect wildfires, notify the appropriate fire service (NSW Fire Brigades or Rural Fire Service) through the "000" emergency system, and provide assistance in containing

and suppressing the fire (assistance would not include active fire fighting as Council has neither the resources or appropriately trained personnel).

6. Consultation with the Rural Fire Service and NSW Fire Brigades during development of fire management plans, and assessment and reduction of fire hazards.
7. Consultation with the Rural Fire Service during assessment of development applications in bushfire prone areas.
8. Consultation with affected landowners and the wider community during the development of fire management plans, and education of the community about Council's fire management practices, procedures and future directions.

## **2.2 Statutory Responsibilities**

Wingecarribee Shire Council and landowners surrounding the reserve have a general legal responsibility to take all reasonable steps to minimise the risk of fires that originate on their property causing personal injury, damage to adjoining property, or damage to items of natural or heritage value protected by government legislation. Wingecarribee Shire Council also has specific responsibilities under various Acts of Parliament for fire management, fire hazard abatement, and the conservation and management of native flora and fauna.

### **2.2.1 NSW Government Legislation**

#### **Rural Fires Act, 1997**

Section 63(1) of the Act requires; "a public authority to take the notified steps (if any) and any other practicable steps to prevent the occurrence of bush fires on, and to minimise the danger of the spread of a bush fire on or from:

- (a) any land vested in or under its control or management, or
- (b) any highway, road, street, land or thoroughfare, the maintenance of which is charged on the authority.

Section 63(3) states that: "A public authority or owner or occupier is liable for the costs incurred by it in performing the duty imposed by this section."

Section 63(4) states that: "The Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee may advise a person on whom a duty is imposed by this section of any steps (whether or not included in a bush fire risk management plan) that are necessary for the proper performance of the duty."

"Notified steps" in this section of the Act mean:

- "(a) any steps that the Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee advises a person to take under subsection (4), or

(b) any steps that are included in a bush fire risk management plan applying to the land.”

Section 66 of the Act requires local authorities to: “by notice in writing, require the occupier or owner (not being a public authority) of any land within the area to carry out bush fire hazard reduction work specified in the notice on the land”. By agreement with the Rural Fire Service, notices under Section 66 of the Act within Wingecarribee Shire are now issued by the Rural Fire Service.

Section 66 of the Act also states that: “A notice requiring the establishment of a fire break cannot require an occupier or owner to kill or remove any trees that are reasonably necessary:

- (a) for shade, shelter, windbreak or fodder purposes, or
- (b) for the protection of threatened species, populations, communities or critical habitats within the meaning of the Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995”.

Section 69 of the Act states that: “A fire control officer, or an officer or member of a fire brigade or other person authorised by a local authority, may for the purpose of forming an opinion as to:

- (a) whether the local authority should serve a notice under section 66 on the occupier or owner of any land, or
  - (b) whether or not such a notice has been complied with,
- enter during the daytime any part of the land (other than a dwelling-house) that it is necessary to inspect in order to form that opinion.”

Section 70 (2) of the Act states that: “If within the time specified in the relevant notice the owner or occupier to whom it is given fails to comply with any requirement of the notice, the local authority or any officers or members of any fire brigade or rural fire brigade or other persons authorised by the local authority may, without prejudice to the liability of the owner or occupier, enter on the land and carry out the bush fire hazard reduction work the owner or occupier was required to do under the notice.”

Section 70 also allows the cost of the works to be recovered from the landowner.

Section 73 (1) of the Act allows the Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service to carry out bush fire hazard reduction work on land:

- “(a) if the work has not been carried out on land by a public authority or owner or occupier of land when, or in the manner, required by a bush fire risk management plan, or
- (b) if, in the opinion of the Commissioner, a public authority or owner or occupier of land has not properly performed a duty under section 63 to take notified steps, or any other practicable steps, that is imposed on the public authority or owner or occupier, or



- (c) if the work has not been carried out by a public authority when, or in the manner, required by the Commissioner under section 74F.”

Section 100C of the Act states that “bush fire hazard reduction work may be carried out on land despite any requirement for an approval, consent or other authorisation for the work made by the *Native Vegetation Conservation Act 1997*, the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*, the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, or any other Act or instrument made under an Act if:

- (a) the work is carried out in accordance with a bush fire risk management plan that applies to the land, and
- (b) there is a bush fire hazard reduction certificate in force in respect of the work and the work is carried out in accordance with any conditions specified in the certificate, and
- (c) the work is carried out in accordance with the provisions of any bush fire code applying to the land specified in the certificate.”

Section 100D states that; “A bush fire hazard reduction certificate is a certificate that authorises the carrying out of bush fire hazard reduction work on land in accordance with:

- (a) a bush fire risk management plan that applies to the land, and
- (b) the provisions of any bush fire code applying to the land specified in the certificate, and
- (c) any conditions specified in the certificate.

Wingecarribee Shire Council is the certifying authority for bushfire hazard reduction activities within reserves under its management. Section 100G of the Act states that:

“(1) Before a certifying authority carries out any bush fire hazard reduction work on land, the certifying authority must certify:

- (a) that a bush fire risk management plan applies to the land, and
- (b) that the certifying authority has taken into consideration the provisions of any bush fire code applying to the land and determined which of them should be complied with in carrying out the work and whether any conditions should be imposed having regard to any provisions of that code, and
- (c) if the certifying authority is a local authority or a public authority, that the notice will be given to the fire control officer for the district in which the land is situated before the work is carried out and to any other person prescribed by the regulations.

(2) A bush fire hazard reduction certificate certified by a certifying authority must:

- (a) specify the provisions of any bush fire code applying to the land that the certifying

authority has determined should be complied with in carrying out the work, and

- (b) specify any conditions that have been imposed by the certifying authority having regard to that bush fire code."

The Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code for use under this section of the Act was gazetted in July 2003.

The Rural Fires Act, 1997, requires all parties involved in fire suppression and prevention to have regard to the principles of ecologically sustainable development when exercising their functions, and when preparing Plans of Operations and Bush Fire Risk Management Plans. Consideration of these principles must include the conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity.

### **Fire Brigades Act 1989**

Section 6(1) of the Act states that: "It is the duty of the Commissioner to take all practicable measures for preventing and extinguishing fires and protecting and saving life and property in case of fire in any fire district."

However Section 10A of the Act states that: "The Commissioner is to have regard to the principles of ecologically sustainable development described in section 6 (2) of the Protection of the Environment Administration Act, 1991, in carrying out any function that affects the environment."

Section 21 of the Act states that the Commissioner of the NSW Fire Brigades is authorised to:

- "(a) plough, burn, clear or otherwise establish or maintain fire breaks on any land (whether or not within a fire district), and
- (b) remove, burn or destroy any flammable matter or other material on any land (whether or not within a fire district) if satisfied that the action is necessary to prevent the outbreak, spread or extension of a bush fire or other fire.

The power conferred by this section must not be exercised except:

- (a) for the purpose of controlling or extinguishing a fire or protecting persons endangered by fire from injury or death or property endangered by fire from damage, or
- (b) with the permission of the person apparently in occupation or control of the land."

### **Local Government Act, 1993**

Gibbergunyah Reserve is classified as community land under this Act. The Act requires councils to have regard for the principles of ecologically sustainable development. Included in Section 8(1) of this Act is a principle requiring a council to manage, develop, protect, restore, enhance and conserve the environment of the area for which it is responsible in a manner that is consistent with,

and promotes the principle of, sustainable development. This includes the integration of biodiversity considerations into the decision-making process. The Act also requires councils to have regard for the content of Recovery Plans for threatened species when preparing plans of management for community land.

### **Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995**

This Act provides for the protection of flora, fauna, plant communities and populations of particular species listed in the schedules of the Act. Three fauna species listed in the schedules of this Act occur in the reserve. The Act requires recovery plans to be prepared for threatened species and plant communities, and threat abatement plans for threatening processes. Section 69 of the Act requires public authorities “to take any appropriate action available to them to implement those measures included in a recovery plan for which they are responsible and must not make decisions that are inconsistent with the provisions of a recovery plan.”

There is a general exemption from the provisions of the Act for any emergency fire fighting activities within the meaning of the Rural Fires Act, 1997.

“High frequency fire resulting in the disruption of life cycle processes in plants and animals and loss of vegetation structure and composition” is listed as a key threatening process in Schedule 3 of the Act. High frequency fire is defined as two or more successive fires close enough together in time to interfere with, or limit, the ability of plants or animals to recruit new individuals into a population, or for plants to build up a seed bank sufficient in size to maintain the population through to the next fire.

“Removal of dead wood and dead trees” has recently been listed as a key threatening process in Schedule 3 of the Act. Examples given in the determination report by the Scientific Committee include: “illegal or poorly regulated firewood collection from forests and woodlands and unsustainable loss of fallen woody debris, which may be stacked, burnt, mulched or otherwise removed from the site”. There is no specific mention of hazard reduction burning in the committee’s determination.

### **National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974**

Aboriginal and European cultural heritage sites are protected under this Act, as well as threatened flora, fauna and plant communities. Section 118A prohibits “harming or picking threatened species, endangered populations or endangered ecological communities” except with the appropriate licence or certificate, or a development consent under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979. However, “this section does not apply in relation to any thing authorised to be done by or under the Rural Fires Act 1997 in relation to any emergency fire fighting act within the meaning of that Act.”

### **2.2.2 Wingecarribee Bushfire Risk Management Plan**

This plan was prepared by the Wingecarribee Bushfire Management Committee under Section 52 of the Rural Fires Act, 1997. It was approved by the Bushfire Coordinating Committee in September 2001. The Bushfire Risk Management Plan has classified the bushfire threat to community assets in the Gibbergunyah Reserve as moderate. Bushfire risk has been classified as moderate for community assets in the northern and western portions of the reserve, and major in the southern portion. The bushfire risk for ecological assets has been classified as major for the whole of the reserve.

The Bushfire Risk Management Plan has designated the southern and eastern portions of the reserve as part of an Asset Protection Zone. The stated objective for this zone is to “protect human life, property and highly valued public assets” by providing “Inner Protection Areas (IPA) and Outer Protection Areas (OPA) around assets or groups of assets which are adjacent to bush fire hazard areas.” The risk management plan also states that “whilst Asset Protection Zones are most commonly applied in residential developments, they also have application for many other asset types.”

Most of the remainder of the reserve has been designated as a Strategic Fire Management Zone. The stated objective for this zone is to: “provide strategic areas of fire protection that will reduce the speed and intensity of bush fires, and reduce the potential for spot fire development.” The stated applications for Strategic Fire Advantage Zones include:

- “• To provide fuel reduced areas which enable the protection of assets by firefighters when Asset Protection Zones are not in place
- To complement Asset Protection Zones where these do not provide adequate protection.
- To provide fuel reduced zones in areas of high ignition potential (eg along roads, rail lines, power lines etc) to slow the development of fires, reduce their spread, and provide for safe suppression.
- To provide strategically located fuel reduced zones (eg across known fire paths) to reduce the potential for fires to become campaign fires and to provide advantageous areas for fire suppression.
- To provide strategically located fuel reduced areas to reduce the vulnerability of assets which are susceptible to fire.”

The Bushfire Risk Management Plan also states that: “In accordance with the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development, and Bush Fire Coordinating Committee Policy, the use of inappropriate fire regimes is to be avoided wherever possible.” The plan explains ‘inappropriate fire regimes’ as follows:

“An inappropriate fire regime is considered to be one where (usually through the decisions or actions of humans) one or more of the fire attributes is occurring outside

its historic range of variation for the area. Where such a change is allowed to continue, changes to the environment are likely to result. Examples of this include areas where prescribed fire is applied too frequently, areas where fire occurrence is reduced (through wildfire suppression and cessation of prescribed burning) such that fires are less frequent and more intense, and areas where the season of burning is changed.”

This is not a helpful explanation for fire management planning purposes as there are generally insufficient records to determine the ‘historic’ fire regime, and it also assumes that all historic fire regimes were ‘appropriate’.

The plan notes that there may be areas where asset protection and biodiversity conservation objectives conflict. In these areas priority is to be given to the protection of life and property.

The approach taken in this fire management plan is to prescribe fire regimes that aim to conserve existing plant community distribution, structure and floristics, unless there is a legitimate reason to change the vegetation. This includes areas where asset protection zones are required around assets within or adjoining the reserve, or where fire may be useful for weed control and bush regeneration.

## 2.3 National Standards and Guidelines

The following documents prepared by Standards Australia deal with bushfire protection issues at a national level:

- Australian Standard 3959 - 1999, Construction of Buildings in Bushfire Prone Areas
- Standards Australia Handbook 36 - 1993, Building in Bushfire Prone Areas.

Australian Standard 3959 is referenced in the Building Code of Australia and provides construction techniques to improve building resistance to varying levels of bushfire attack by wind-blown burning debris, radiant heat and direct flame contact. The NSW Rural Fire Service and Planning NSW publication *Planning for Bushfire Protection* (2001) contains instructions on how this standard is to be used in NSW. The Standards Australia Handbook 36 (Ramsay and Dawkins, 1993) provides general advice on siting, landscaping, design and construction of buildings in bushfire prone areas

## **3. Bushfire Risks**

Extreme fire conditions occur in Wingecarribee Shire when dry winters and springs are followed by hot summers. Under these conditions, fuels are very dry and fires that start during periods of strong, dry north-westerly to westerly winds can be expected to move quickly downwind, and then move more or less at right angles on a broad front when the subsequent southerly wind change arrives. Fires that start under these conditions can reach a very high intensity in a short time, even in areas with relatively low fuel loads, and are very difficult to control until the weather conditions abate.

### **3.1 Bushfire History and Causes**

The most recent major wildfire to affect the whole of the reserve was in 1939. Residents in the area who remember this fire report that it burnt the whole of the reserve. Since that time there have been small fires in the reserve and periodic hazard reduction burning, but no fires that have burnt all of the reserve. Information on the recent incidence of fires in the reserve was taken from Rural Fire Service and Wingecarribee Shire Council records, supplemented by information from local fire brigades and field observations in September 2003. The area covered by larger hazard reduction burns in the reserve since 1990 is shown in Figure 3.

Recent wildfires have been due to arson or lightning. Due to a prompt response by the Rural Fire Service, or NSW Fire Brigades, these fires have been quickly extinguished and none have burnt more than 0.5 ha.

### **3.2 Current Hazard Levels**

The higher the intensity of a wildfire the greater its destructiveness and the more difficult it is to control. Fire intensity is a function of the heat content of the fuel, the quantity of fuel (fuel load), and the rate of spread of the fire. The heat content of vegetation fuels is roughly constant, so fire intensity is largely determined by slope and weather conditions (wind speed and relative humidity), and fuel loads.

**Figure 3 – Recent fires in Gibbergunyah Reserve**

Fine fuels are the main factor influencing fire behaviour, (larger fuels burn during a fire but do not contribute significantly to the spread of a fire). Fine fuels consist of live and dead plant matter (including grasses, bracken, leaves, bark, and twigs and branches) less than 6 mm in diameter. This measure normally includes any fine fuel in the understorey as well as litter on the ground. Fine fuel load (measured in tonnes per hectare) is therefore used as a convenient measure of the underlying fire hazard in a particular area. The fine fuel load at any given time is a balance between the rate of fuel build up, and factors that remove fuel, such as litter decomposition and fire. In the absence of fire, fuel loads build up to a maximum level where the rate of fuel production equals the rate of decomposition. This theoretical maximum varies for different vegetation types, however it is rare for dry eucalypt forests and woodlands to reach their maximum fuel loadings due to relatively frequent fires.

Fuel loads can be roughly categorised in terms of the potential threat they pose as follows:

Low - < 5 tonnes per hectare

Medium - 5 to 15 tonnes per hectare

High - >15 tonnes per hectare.

Fine fuel loads in the various vegetation types in the reserve were assessed using the visual method in Appendix B. Currently fuel loads in the reserve range from medium to high largely reflecting the density of the vegetation cover. The exception are areas on the northern and western side of the reserve that have had management burns in the last few years. These areas currently have low fuel loads. The fuel loads over most of the reserve are sufficient to generate uncontrollable crown fires on days of high to extreme fire danger.

### **3.3 Assets at Risk from Fire**

Assets potentially at risk from fire include; dwellings, infrastructure, and other items, such as regeneration plantings, which would cost money to replace; and items of scenic, cultural and natural heritage value which could be damaged or destroyed by fire, or fire suppression activities. Each landowner in the area, including Wingecarribee Shire Council, has an obligation to reduce a fire hazard where it is a threat to neighbouring properties. However, even with extensive hazard reduction burning, the risk of high intensity wildfires occurring in the reserve cannot be eliminated. Therefore consideration must be given to protection measures that will reduce the risk of fire damage to assets in and surrounding the reserve. The main assets adjoining the reserve that are at risk from fire are the surrounding rural and residential properties. Assets within the reserve that are considered at risk from bushfires are shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4 – Assets at risk from fire in Gibbergunyah Reserve**

### 3.3.1 Bushfire Risk to Natural Heritage Assets

Natural heritage assets include native flora and fauna, as well as scenic values. This plan minimises the risk of fire damaging these assets through measures to minimise the risk of wildfires in the reserve, and ensuring that any prescribed burns are of low intensity to limit canopy scorch, and not so frequent as to prevent the existing tree cover regenerating.

No threatened plant species have been recorded in the reserve, however three threatened fauna species, Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*), Glossy Black-Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus lathami*), and the Yellow-bellied Glider (*Petaurus australi*), have been recorded within the reserve.

The Powerful Owl requires large, hollow-bearing trees for nesting and thick foliated trees for roosting. The Powerful Owl feeds mainly on possums so extensive areas of forest with good populations of arboreal mammals are required for food. The prime habitat for the Powerful Owl in the reserve is the Peppermint – Gully Gum Tall Forest in the deeper gullies in the reserve.

The Glossy Black-Cockatoo requires old trees with hollows for nesting, and mature stands of *Allocasuarina* and *Casuarina sp* holding good quantities of cones as a food source. The stands of mature Black She-oak (*Allocasuarina littoralis*) on the northern and north-eastern slopes of the reserve provide an important feeding area for this species in the district. There are no records of the Glossy Black-Cockatoo breeding in the reserve.

The Yellow-bellied Glider feeds on eucalypt blossom and sap. It requires large trees with hollows for denning close to suitable food trees for foraging. In Gibbergunyah Reserve there is suitable habitat in tall open forest and open forest in the northern and eastern parts of the reserve where their favoured food tree, Grey Gum (*Eucalyptus punctata*), occurs.

The Greater Glider (*Petauroides volans*) a “species of special concern” is also known to occur in the reserve. This species is dependant on mature or dead trees with large hollows to provide dens.

All these species are likely to be adversely affected by hot fires that are frequent enough to reduce food sources and/or large tree hollows in the reserve. These species are likely to benefit from a mosaic burning program which maintains relatively long inter-fire intervals while reducing the risk of large, high-intensity, wildfires.

There are no threatened plant communities in the reserve, although the species composition of the forest on the area influenced by shale (Shale Forest PIP-GLB) near Ninety Acre Hill is of local conservation value. The remaining forest in Gibbergunyah Reserve provides a reasonably large area of good quality forest habitat for flora and fauna, including threatened species. In particular, tree hollow-using species such as arboreal mammals and some birds, find good habitat in the

larger trees in this forest. Further details on the flora and fauna assets in the reserve can be found in the ecological investigation report by Kevin Mills and Associates in Appendix E.

The main fire risk to natural heritage assets in the reserve is from fire regimes that are outside the thresholds within which a particular plant community, or habitat for fauna, has viability in the long-term. Fire regimes within the thresholds of the particular plant community will help maintain its long-term viability, whereas fire regimes outside the thresholds are likely to lead to progressive changes in the structure and floristics of the plant community, and loss of habitat for the fauna favouring that plant community. In small isolated reserves like Gibbergunyah there is an added risk from large wildfires which could burn the whole of the reserve leading to local extinction of flora and fauna species. Management burning of the plant communities in the reserve at the optimum frequency for their long-term viability is considered the best way to conserve habitat in the reserve. Management burning in a mosaic pattern, along with maintenance of fire trails, is the best way to minimise the risk of high intensity wildfires burning the whole of the reserve. The fire management requirements of the different plant communities/habitats in the reserve is given in Table 1.

This fire management plan is based on current knowledge of the effects of fire on the flora and fauna species known, or considered likely, to occur in the reserve. Where there is a lack of information about the fire ecology of a particular threatened species or plant community, a fire regime has been applied that aims to conserve their habitat by maintaining the structure and floristics of the particular plant community in which they occur. It should be noted that the flora and fauna in the reserve have persisted in an environment that has been burnt in the past at varying frequencies. The continued presence of these species in the reserve suggests that they have the capacity to at least survive a number of fires.

Additional species of conservation value may occur in the reserve. If any such species are discovered this plan may need to be modified to incorporate the fire management requirements of the new species.

Although the management burns prescribed in this plan may kill some individuals of particular threatened species, the management prescriptions should have an overall beneficial effect on species of conservation value by ensuring the long-term conservation of their habitats, and reducing the risk of large wildfires eliminating isolated populations. The monitoring and review procedures in the plan will allow fire regimes to be modified as new information on the ecology of any of the flora and fauna species of conservation value in the reserve becomes available.

**Table 1 - Fire management requirements of the vegetation types in Gibbergunyah Reserve**

### **3.3.2 Bushfire Risk to Built and Cultural Assets**

No Aboriginal or cultural heritage sites likely to be at risk from fire have been identified in the reserve. There is also no infrastructure in the reserve that could be damaged by fire. The only built assets at risk from fire in the reserve are perimeter fencing and scattered facilities constructed for visitors including, signs, timber seats, plant species name tags etc. The main built assets at risk from fires in the reserve are the buildings and infrastructure in the residential and rural areas that surround the reserve.

The degree of fire threat at any particular time is a combination of fine fuel quantity, slope, and the prevailing weather conditions. The actual risk of a fire causing damage to an asset is a function the degree of threat, the probability of a fire igniting, and any measures taken to prevent the fire causing damage.

The four major modes of attack by bushfires that can cause damage to assets are:

1. wind-blown burning debris
2. radiant heat which can ignite flammable materials ahead of the fire front and shatter glass
3. flame contact
4. strong winds generated or intensified by the fire.

The potential for damage to buildings in the path of large fires burning out of the reserve will depend largely on:

- whether the fire will approach upslope or downslope
- the quantity and distribution of fuel surrounding the building
- whether they are defended during the fire
- their design
- the materials from which they are constructed
- how well they have been maintained.

The fire risk to the built and cultural heritage assets within and surrounding the reserve has been assessed using a procedure developed from Australian Standard 4360 – 1999 Risk Management. This procedure combines established risk factors in order to rank the level of fire risk so that implementation of fire risk reduction measures can be prioritised.

There is insufficient data available to assess the likelihood of a high intensity fire starting in the reserve, however there is sufficient fine fuel within the reserve to sustain a high intensity fire on days of extreme fire danger. The likelihood of ignition is therefore taken as constant in the analysis, i.e. it is certain to occur at some time in the future. The analysis is restricted to fires

burning within the reserve, or approaching surrounding assets from the direction of the reserve. Where there are a number of possible fire approaches from bushland in the reserve, the approach with the highest threat has been used in the analysis.

The analysis is based on three main factors:

1. fire threat in terms of fuel loads and fire approach
2. vulnerability to damage of the asset
3. potential consequences of a fire damaging or destroying the asset.

The analysis is carried out by assigning each factor a relative score, and multiplying the scores to determine a relative level of risk.

0 – minimal risk of fire damage

1 to 250 – low risk

251 to 1000 – moderate risk

1001 to 11664 – high risk.

Scores are weighted where it is considered that the factor would have a major influence on fire risk. The score numbers are only multiplied so that assets that are not at risk from fire have a score of zero. The scores allow the level of risk to be placed in the broad risk categories of low, medium and high. These risk categories have the following general meanings:

LOW – low levels of burning ember attack, possible spotfires and/or asset is of low value.

MODERATE – asset likely to be impacted on by a high intensity fire front but has features that will reduce the intensity of the fire attack, or provide some protection from fires.

HIGH – asset likely to be impacted on by a high intensity fire front with few, if any, features that would reduce the severity of fire attack.

The results of the analysis and proposed management strategies are shown in Table 2.

### **Fuel Loads**

Vegetation type has been used as a surrogate for fuel loads as actual fuel loads vary with time after the last fire, but reach different maximum levels in different vegetation types.

(A) VEGETATION TYPE	SCORE
Wet forests with a dense shrub understorey	6
Dry forest & woodland, shrub or heath understorey	5
Heathland and shrubland	4

(A) VEGETATION TYPE	SCORE
Forest, grass or fern understorey	3
Grassland and grassy woodland	2
Rainforest	1

Scores are halved where the vegetation threatening the asset is less than 1 ha in area, or the potential fire run is less than 20 m.

### Fire Approach

Fire approach has two aspects; slope and wind direction. Fires burning downslope generally have a lower intensity than fires burning upslope in the same fuel type. Extreme fire weather generally occurs with hot, dry north-westerly to westerly winds. These winds are usually generated ahead of cold fronts which cause the winds to back round to the south-west and south as the front passes. This wind change can turn the previous flank of the fire into the head fire which can continue to burn with high intensity until the cooler temperatures and higher humidity associated with the change increase fuel moisture levels. The two fire approach factors have been scored as follows:

(B) FIRE APPROACH - SLOPE	SCORE
Up slopes greater than 10°	5
Up slopes between 5° and 10°	3
Across slopes – 5° to + 5°	2
Down slopes greater than 5°	1

(C) FIRE APPROACH - DIRECTION	SCORE
North-west through west to south-east	3
North, north-east and east	1

### Vulnerability to Damage

Vulnerability to damage has been assessed using three factors; the combustibility of the asset, fire protection measures in place in the form of an Asset Protection Zone (APZ), and whether the asset is accessible by fire brigade vehicles. An Asset Protection Zone is a natural or managed area around an asset where there is insufficient fuel to carry a fire, even under extreme conditions. The width of the Asset Protection Zone determines the likely severity of bushfire attack. Where there is no Asset Protection Zone an asset can be subjected to flame contact, intense radiant heat, and wind-blown burning embers. With an inadequate Asset Protection Zone in terms of the recommended widths in the Rural Fire Service document *Planning for Bushfire Protection*, an asset

could be subjected to intense radiant heat and wind-blown burning embers. With an adequate Asset Protection Zone the asset should only be subjected to attack by wind-blown burning embers.

(D) COMBUSTIBILITY	SCORE
Asset constructed of non combustible materials capable of maintaining structural integrity during a bushfire	0
Asset contains structural, or other essential elements, that are combustible, or may fail at the temperatures likely to be generated by a bushfire (all dwellings have been included in this category)	2
Asset is constructed primarily of combustible materials	3

(E) ASSET PROTECTION ZONE	SCORE
None (flame contact, intense radiant heat, burning embers)	3
Present but inadequate (intense radiant heat, burning embers)	2
Adequate (wind-blown burning embers)	1

### Accessibility

This factor assesses the ability of the fire brigades to actively defend an asset during a bushfire. The assessment is in terms of the ability of fire brigade vehicles to access the asset, and assumes that there will be sufficient water available to at least extinguish spotfires on or around the asset. It should be noted that in a major fire where fire fighting resources are heavily committed it may not be possible to provide crews to defend every dwelling in the path of a fire. It is also possible that in high intensity fires it may not be safe for fire fighters to actively defend an asset.

This factor also provides an indication of the likely danger and difficulty in evacuating residents during a major bushfire. It should be noted that in all areas near bushland evacuation becomes progressively more dangerous as the fire front approaches.

(F) ACCESSIBILITY	SCORE
No fire brigade vehicle access	4
Dead end, light tanker only	3
Dead end, light and heavy tanker / pumper	2
Through road or fire trail	1



## Potential Consequences

The following potential consequences of fire were used in the analysis:

(G) CONSEQUENCES	SCORE
CATASTROPHIC; potential loss of life; loss of structures equipment and infrastructure; high financial loss.	6
MAJOR; potential serious injury, some loss or major damage to structures, equipment and infrastructure; medium financial loss.	4
MODERATE; localised damage; possible minor injury, total loss of structures, equipment and infrastructure unlikely; low financial loss if any.	2
MINOR; no injury, superficial damage to structures, equipment and infrastructure, if any; very low financial loss if any.	1
INSIGNIFICANT; no injury or damage likely.	0

The injury factor in the consequences assessment assumes that residents will be sheltering in their dwellings during a bushfire. Some assets, such as Aboriginal heritage sites, may not be directly damaged by fire but may be damaged by fire management and fire suppression activities, such as construction of fire control lines. These risks are noted under “Comments” in Table 2.

The management strategies recommended in Table 2 will reduce the existing fire risk but in most cases will not eliminate it. Active protection of an asset during a fire can greatly reduce the fire risk. From a planning point of view it is not possible to determine if this will be available, although the potential for active protection is incorporated into the analysis under Factor F “accessibility”. Recommended Asset Protection Zone (APZ) widths are in accordance with the requirements of the Rural Fire Service’s *Bushfire Environmental Assessment Code*. The whole of this APZ needs to be maintained as an Inner Protection Area. For all buildings within 100 m of bushland in the reserve, the fire risk could be further reduced if the owners bring the buildings up to at least Level 1 construction requirements in Australian Standard 3959 – 1999 *Construction of Buildings in Bushfire-prone Areas*, and regularly maintain buildings to ensure there are no flammable materials (such as leaves in gutters) in contact with combustible parts of the building.

Assets at medium and high risk from damage from fire will need to be protected during management burns in the reserve.

**Table 2 – Fire Risk Assessment for Built and Cultural Assets in Gibbergunyah Reserve**

## 4. Fire Management Issues

### 4.1 Management Responsibilities

Management of the reserve is the sole responsibility of the Wingecarribee Shire Council, who is assisted by the Gibbergunyah Reserve Management Committee. Council has a responsibility under the *Rural Fires Act (1997)* to prevent the spread of wildfires occurring in the reserve to adjoining property. This fire management plan will help to fulfil that “duty of care”. The reserve is within a NSW Rural Fire Service district and the Mittagong brigade is responsible for suppression of fires within reserve, assisted when required by other Rural Fire Service brigades and the NSW Fire Brigades. Management burning within the reserve is undertaken by the Wingecarribee Rural Fire Service.

### 4.2 Prescribed Burning

Hazard reduction burning has been carried out in the reserve for many years, but without a documented strategy. Decisions to burn appear to have been based on the local Rural Fire Service brigade captain’s assessment of risk. Anecdotal evidence and field observation indicates a significant reduction in the amount of management burning in the reserve over the last 10 years. Significant burning in the reserve has only recommenced last year. Some hazard reduction burning has been done in bushland on private property adjoining the reserve at the request of the landowner. The most recent hazard reduction burns in the reserve have been along the western side of the Gang Gang Trail to help control fires moving into the reserve from the west.

The approach adopted in this plan is to divide the reserve into areas where burning will be used primarily for hazard management (strategic hazard management) or for habitat management (ecosystem management). This is supplemented by Asset Protection Zones maintained by other methods for protection of property. Habitat management burns will have the additional benefit of reduced bushfire hazard for a period following each fire.

### 4.3 Fire Trails and Foot Tracks

The reserve has an extensive system of fire trails most of which are in good condition. The exception is the portion of the Boundary Trail running along the western side of the reserves which has a steep, eroded section. The only vehicle access to the reserve from a public road is from Howards Lane to the north. However, there are a number of gates in the perimeter fence that allow emergency access and egress across private property. Of most importance is the access across private property from Boronia Street to the south, and Council should formalise an access arrangement with the landowner to ensure that this route is not inadvertently blocked. Public foot

access to the reserve is from Howards Lane on the northern side, and along the side of the Bowral Country Club from Boronia Street on the southern side.

The location of the trails within the reserve considered necessary for fire management are shown in Figure 5, and their condition assessed in Table 3. No new fire trails are considered necessary for fire management. Any other vehicle trails within the reserve that are not required for other management purposes can be closed. The Mittagong Rural Fire Service Brigade assists Council by periodically checking all the fire trails and clearing away any fallen trees and branches

Vehicle access to the reserve is controlled by a locked gate at the end of Howards Lane, and unauthorised use by trails bikes and 4WD vehicles is rare. The location of the existing gates is shown in Figure 5. The Rural Fire Service has a key to the main gate at the end of Howards Lane, but Council needs to ensure that other emergency services, such as police and fire service, also have keys.

Guidelines for the construction, repair and maintenance of fire trails in the reserve are given in Management Procedures (MP) 1 and 2 in Appendix A. Trails in the reserve that are closed should be rehabilitated properly to ensure they do not erode and affect water quality in nearby watercourses. Guidelines for rehabilitating fire trails are given in MP 3 in Appendix A. Any new foot tracks in the reserve should be constructed according to the guidelines in MP 4 (Appendix A), and should be routed along the boundary of fire management units wherever possible.

The existing trails and foot tracks provide adequate access to the reserve for fire management, and have been used as fire control lines for the prescribed burning recommended in this plan. All fire trails in the reserve need to be clearly signposted to avoid confusion when out of town fire brigades and other emergency services are operating in the area.

**Figure 5 – Fire Trails and Foot Tracks in Gibbergunyah Reserve**

**Table 3 - Condition and maintenance of fire trails in Gibbergunyah Reserve**

## 4.4 Asset Protection Zones

The higher the intensity of a bushfire approaching a building, or other asset, the greater the risk of ignition. Fire intensity is controlled by a number of factors including temperature, humidity, wind speed, slope, and quantity of fine fuel (fuel load). The only one of these factors that we can control is fuel load. It is therefore desirable to reduce the risk of damage to a building or other asset by creating a zone around the building where the amount of flammable fine fuel is kept at a low level. These are called Asset Protection Zones and consist of an Inner Protection Area immediately adjacent to the asset at risk from fire, and an Outer Protection Area between the Inner Protection Area and bushland. The width of both these zones must be increased as slope increases in order to maintain a reasonable degree of fire protection.

The main aim of these two zones is to ensure that there is a reduction in the intensity of a bushfire as it approaches an asset at risk from fire, and the asset is not exposed to intense radiant heat or flame contact. Asset Protection Zones also provide:

- relatively safe access for fire-fighters
- a control line for fire fighting operations
- a relatively safe refuge area for fire-fighters and residents.

Inner Protection Areas are normally established within individual lots and maintained by the landowner or resident. Outer Protection Areas may be required on large lots, and in some cases need to be maintained on adjoining private property, or in the reserve.

The existence and adequacy of defensible spaces on individual lots adjoining the reserve was not surveyed as part of this fire management plan, except where this could be easily observed without entering the property. Nevertheless it must be stressed that establishment and maintenance of Asset Protection Zones around residences bordering the reserve is essential for fire protection. Private landowners are responsible for establishment and maintenance of Asset Protection Zones on their properties where required to protect their dwellings, or neighbours' dwellings. Wingecarribee Shire Council is responsible for maintaining the portion of any Asset Protection Zone that falls within the reserve.

There is adequate space on surrounding private properties for the required Asset Protection Zones, except for one dwelling on the southern side of the reserve. The location of the Asset Protection Zone around the dwelling to the south that will need to be maintained within the reserve is shown on Figure 5. This will require thinning of the understorey and removal of leaf litter between the fire trail (Goanna Circuit) and the reserve boundary, adjacent to the dwelling. There will be little point in Council maintaining the portion of the Asset Protection Zone in the reserve unless the adjoining landowner establishes and maintains an Asset Protection Zone between their dwelling

and the reserve. A cooperative approach between Council and the landowner is needed to maintain adequate fire protection. If the landowner is unwilling to cooperate, Council should request the Rural Fire Service to issue a notice under Section 66 of the Rural Fires Act, 1997, to ensure that an adequate Asset Protection Zone is established and maintained. Although Council has the power to issue notices under Section 66 of the Rural Fires Act, 1997, it currently has an agreement with the Rural Fire Service to issue these notices in the shire.

No specific fire protection measures are recommended for the smaller assets within the reserve such as signs and seats. These are all vulnerable to fire damage and will need to be protected during management burns. However, it is not considered cost effective to try to protect these items from wildfire as the cost of replacement will be far less than the cost of maintaining cleared areas around these assets.

## **4.5 Water Supply**

There is no water source within the reserve, however, water for fire fighting is available from fire hydrants in the streets in Mittagong and Bowral to the east and south of the reserve, and dams on surrounding properties. For a major fire these sources could be supplemented by the Rural Fire Service's bulk water tanker if it is available. As the water supplies on properties surrounding the reserve are readily accessible from within the reserve via gates in the boundary fence, it is not considered necessary to provide a water storage for fire fighting within the reserve.

## **4.6 Fire Detection and Suppression**

Gibbergunyah Reserve is highly visible from Bowral and Mittagong and it is likely that any fires would be promptly reported. The fire trail system within the reserve has been sufficient in the past to allow fire brigades to rapidly reach and contain fires within the reserve. There is good perimeter access along the southern side of the reserve where dwellings are closest to the reserve, although direct access to this boundary of the reserve is only through private property.

## **4.7 Bushland Management**

Surprisingly few introduced plants have been reported from the reserve, and there are no known infestations of noxious weeds. Care will be required during management burning to ensure that weeds are not given the opportunity to invade the reserve.

Fire can provide the disturbance that many introduced species need to spread to new areas, as well as to expand existing populations. Other fire management activities, such as construction and maintenance of fire trails, and bulldozing of fire breaks during fire suppression, can also provide opportunities for weeds to colonise native bushland. The likely response to fire of introduced



species that could potentially become established in the reserve is given in Table 4.

**Table 4 - Response to fire of the main weed species in Gibbergunyah Reserve**

Some introduced species are best controlled by herbicide application to regrowth following a fire. Other species can sometimes be controlled by the application of a fire regime that stimulates germination of seed but kills the regrowth before it has been able to flower. To ensure that weeds do not become a problem it is recommended that weed control activities be integrated with the management burning program in this plan. Management Procedure (MP) 9 in Appendix A includes guidelines for integrating weed management with management burning, and for minimising the risk of weed invasion following wildfires. These guidelines should ensure that fires in the reserve do not cause weeds to spread.

It should be noted that bush regeneration plantings in previously cleared areas may increase the fire hazard. Any proposals for bush regeneration in the reserve should be considered in the context of this fire management plan to ensure that they do not compromise fire protection measures proposed in this plan. In general plantings should not be allowed:

- in defensible spaces established around assets at risk
- on fire breaks
- within 1 m of the edge of fire trails.

In some cases it may be possible to landscape Asset Protection Zones and fire breaks to reduce their visual impact. Guidelines for landscaping in Asset Protection Zones are given in MP 6.

## **4.8 Conservation of Biodiversity**

Fire plays an important role in maintaining biodiversity in Australia. Changes in the fire regime (season, frequency and intensity of fire) can cause progressive changes in plant communities. Frequent fire and long-term exclusion of fire have both been shown to lead to progressive changes in plant community structure, and a reduction in biodiversity. Failure to use fire properly as a management tool can be considered a threat to the natural habitats in the reserve.

Frequent burning of native forests will generally reduce species diversity and make it more vulnerable to weed invasion. A high fire frequency (less than 5 years) will usually favour grasses in the understorey at the expense of shrubs, and severely restrict the re-establishment of canopy species. For this reason "high frequency fire resulting in the disruption of life cycle processes in plants and animals and loss of vegetation structure and composition" has been listed as a key threatening process on Schedule 3 of the Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995.

Fire can adversely affect fauna by killing individual animals, removing their habitat, or removing specific elements in their habitats, such as nest sites and feeding areas. Extensive, high-intensity wildfires pose probably the major threat to fauna in the reserve, and so this plan includes measures to minimise the risk of wildfires burning the whole of the reserve. This fire management plan also

aims to conserve the known habitats of fauna species of conservation value in the reserve by prescribing an appropriate fire regime to ensure the long-term viability of the species, and ensuring the critical habitat elements are protected as much as possible.

The drier forest plant communities in the reserve are considered to be dependent on fire to maintain their present structure and floristics in the long term. Periodic burning will help to maintain diversity in the understorey, and allow fire dependent species to germinate and establish. However, there is a need to minimise damage to important habitat elements (such as dead trees, old logs and stumps) during these burns, and to ensure adequate retention of unburnt patches of each forest type to act as refugia for recolonisation of burnt areas. The management procedure for prescribed burning in Appendix A of this plan includes the retention of dead trees, logs, and stumps as one of its prescribed outcomes.

Currently there is some debate over the optimal season for burning dry forests, grassy woodlands and grasslands. In fact, it is likely that they benefit from a varied fire regime. The season of burning specified in this plan has therefore been deliberately varied, except where there has been a specific need, such as avoiding the flowering time of a threatened species.

## **4.9 Stakeholder and Community Concerns**

At the commencement of the project Wingecarribee Shire Council sent a letter to all landowners adjoining the reserve informing them that the fire management plan was being prepared and inviting them to have input into the plans by sending in a written submission, attending a community “walk and talk” at the reserve, or by contacting the consultant team directly. The community “walk and talk” was held in the reserve in June 2003. The main community comments and concerns about fire management in the reserve expressed during the walk and talk, and in written submissions were as follows:

- Lightning strikes are common in the reserve.
- Fire management plan boundaries should be extended to logical features.
- Concern about who is responsible about clearing fallen trees off trails.
- The whole of the reserve was burnt in 1939.
- The local volunteer bushfire brigade is well regarded by residents surrounding the reserve.
- Existing fire trails should be used as boundaries for burning blocks in preference to constructing new ones.
- Water supply and vehicle access considered an important issue for fire fighting.
- Hazard reduction is a concern for surrounding property owners.

- 
- Concern that hazard reduction burns are undertaken with consideration of the Gibbergunyah Committee's stated objectives, i.e. protection and preservation of native flora/fauna, geographical and cultural features, and provision of an attractive public recreation amenity.
  - RFS should consult with representative/s of the Gibbergunyah Committee when planning any hazard reduction burns within the Committee's specific areas of concern i.e. central area from southern boundary to northern face – area contained by the fire trails and the Glen Track, plus general area west of the Gang Gang fire trail surrounding the central features i.e. the 90 Acre Hill Look Out/plaque, the Aboriginal plaques and Glen Creek valley.
  - Fire should be excluded from The Glen walking trail.
  - The reserve committee would like, as a general principle, a 25 m buffer of unburnt bush left along each trail, to maintain the visual quality of the reserve for walkers.
  - Hazard reduction burning should be concentrated on the western, eastern and southern boundaries of the reserve.
  - All adjoining residents should take special precautions, in addition to the hazard reduction burning by the RFS.
  - Blocks of undeveloped land adjoining the reserve, should be included in the burning areas in the plan, and considered as extending the reserve's bushland for the purposes of establishing appropriate fuel levels; fuel reduction practices; and bushfire management proposals.
  - Council should require new developments adjoining the reserve to have adequate Asset Protection Zones on each property.
  - A summary of report findings and recommendations should be provided to all who made submissions, attended "Walk and Talk" sessions and be made available to the general population e.g. published in the newspaper etc.
  - Would like to see participative fire management schemes set up in the area.
  - Council should provide support to residents in accordance with any recommendations made in the report, to be prepared for bushfire, e.g. up-grading of water supplies and/or in provision of tanks and pumps.

The Gibbergunyah Reserve Committee, made comments on the draft of this report. The main issues raised Included:

- Formal access to the reserve from Boronia Street
- Council to arrange for any new foot tracks to follow fire management unit boundaries
- Council to provide fire trail signage.

- Visitor facilities (signs, seats etc.) to be protected during management burning.
- A 25 m wide unburnt buffer to be left along trails.
- Vegetation along water courses not to be burnt.

These comments have been incorporated into the plan where appropriate. It should be noted that leaving an unburnt buffer along walking trails during management burning, whilst desirable for aesthetic reasons, is very time consuming to implement, particularly along walking tracks where there is no vehicle access. Implementing this recommendation could result in burns being delayed, or being considered 'too difficult' and not happening at all. It is therefore considered that the unburnt buffer along walking tracks should be implemented only where it will not cause excessive delays to burns, or major difficulties for crews. Priority should be given to high usage trails.

## 5. Fire Management Objectives

The specific fire management objectives recommended for Gibbergunyah Reserve for the 15 year duration of this fire management plan are as follows:

### **Fire Prevention and Asset Protection**

1. Minimise the risk of wildfires starting in the reserve.
2. Minimise the risk of fire to users of the reserve.
3. Minimise the risk of wildfire damaging built and cultural heritage assets in and surrounding the reserve.
4. Minimise the impact of fire and fire management activities on water quality.
5. Implement planning controls on new developments within and adjoining the reserve to ensure they incorporate adequate bushfire protection measures.

### **Access and Water Supply**

6. Maintain existing emergency vehicle access points and fire trails shown on Figure 5 in a trafficable condition.
7. Minimise damage to the fire trail system by preventing unauthorised vehicle access.
8. Signpost all fire trails at their access points, and at trail intersections.
9. Close and rehabilitate all vehicle trails not designated as fire trails in Figure 5, and not required for other management purposes.
10. Construct any future foot tracks so as to maximise their use for fire management.
11. Ensure an adequate and accessible water supply for fire fighting.

### **Conservation of Biodiversity**

12. Apply the appropriate fire regime to populations of flora and fauna of conservation value in the reserve that require periodic fire for their long-term survival.
13. Exclude fire from the Shale Forest (PIP-GLB) near the Ninety Acre Hill for the duration of this plan.
14. Implement a mosaic burning program in selected forest plant communities to maintain and enhance existing habitat diversity, and reduce overall fuel loads in bushland areas.
15. Control unwanted plant species through coordinating fire management and weed control activities.

### **Coordination and Human Resources**

16. Coordinate fire management activities in the reserve amongst the various stakeholders.

17. Ensure all personnel carrying out fire management activities in the reserve are suitably trained, equipped and supervised.
18. Develop, assist development of, or utilise existing education programs and materials aimed at:
  - reducing arson
  - informing residents adjacent to the reserve of fire safety issues, and measures to improve protection of themselves and their property
  - informing residents of adjoining properties about the potential impact of their fuel management activities on environmental and other values
  - interpreting fire management activities for the public, particularly the role of fire in maintaining biodiversity.
19. Encourage the setting up of Community Fire Units in moderate and high risk urban areas adjoining the reserve.

#### **Monitoring, Records and Review**

20. Maintain up-to-date information on location of dwellings, fire trails and their condition, water points, Asset Protection Zones, and areas burnt in prescribed fires and wildfires.
21. Monitor the impact of fire management activities in the reserve. Adjust practices to achieve relevant objectives, and periodically review the fire management plan.

The actions recommended to achieve these objectives are given in the management action summary table in Section 8.



## **6. Plan Implementation**

### **6.1 Community Education, Awareness and Involvement**

In order to inform key sectors of the community about fire management issues in the reserve, an information sheet has been prepared that can be made available to residents living close to bushland (see Appendix F). The information sheet is designed to cover issues relevant to fire protection in Wingecarribee Shire that are not covered in general pamphlets available from the NSW Fire Brigades or the Rural Fire Service. Appropriate Rural Fire Service community education pamphlets should be distributed along with the information sheet.

A Community Fire Unit has recently been established for the Sunset Point Drive area in Mittagong. These units help promote awareness of bushfire issues and provide additional resources for fire fighting. This could provide a model for a Community Fire Unit in the urban area to the south of Gibbergunyah Reserve.

### **6.2 Fire Management Units**

In order to implement the prescribed burning component of the fire management plan, the plant communities in the reserve have been divided into a mosaic of management units which can be burnt at a frequency, season and intensity that is optimal for the plant communities within each unit (see Figure 6). These units allow for implementation of the most appropriate methods for managing fire hazard whilst ensuring the maintenance of biodiversity. A number of the units include private property and therefore successful implementation of this plan will require the cooperation of these landowners. Some units close to assets at risk have been designated as Strategic Hazard Management Units and should be burnt as required to maintain relatively low fuel loads.

Wherever possible existing fire trails, tracks and suitable natural features have been used for fire management unit boundaries. This has required some of the boundaries to be located outside the boundary of the reserve. Use of these existing fire control lines will reduce the amount of preparation required prior to burning. In some instances plant community boundaries have been used as fire management unit boundaries.

The small area of Shale Forest ((PIP-GLB) near the summit of Ninety Acre Hill has been excluded from burning for the duration of this plan, as well as some areas of Peppermint - Gully Gum Tall Forest (PIP-SMI).

In addition, vegetation within 5 m of watercourses within the reserve should not be burnt wherever possible. This will help to minimise the impact of the prescribed burning program on water quality.

It should be noted that areas excluded from the prescribed burning program will still be vulnerable to wildfires. In fact wildfires in these areas are likely to be of higher intensity, and cause greater damage, than in areas included in the prescribed burning program due to higher fuel loads.

### **6.3 Prescribed Fire Regimes**

The general approach in this fire management plan is to burn the areas close to adjoining residential areas, and on the western side of the main (Gang Gang) fire trail, for strategic hazard management, and the remainder of the reserve primarily for ecosystem management. The strategic hazard management units will be burnt primarily to maintain relatively low fuel loads (less than 10 tonnes per hectare) to strengthen fire control lines (fire trails and asset protection zones). The ecosystem management units will be burnt at the optimal fire frequency for the vegetation in the unit.

Minor reviews of the burning schedules are recommended every 5 years and a major review of the whole plan every 15 years. To allow for flexibility in budgeting and planning burns have been scheduled within five 3-year periods as shown in Table 5. The burns can take place at any suitable time during the specified 3-year period. If a wildfire burns more than half of a unit, the whole of the unit should be considered to have been burnt and the schedule adjusted accordingly. In order to create a mosaic of native bushland with different fire histories, adjoining units should generally not be burnt in the same 3-year period.

The fire management units scheduled for burning should be inspected some months prior to the proposed burn to check that the scheduling and burning prescriptions are still appropriate, and to determine if there are weeds present that require treatment prior to burning. Where treatment of weeds is required, it should be carried out at least 3 months in advance of the burn to allow treated weeds to desiccate.

### **6.4 Administration**

Management Procedure (MP) 10 in Appendix A was prepared to ensure effective coordination of fire management activities amongst the various stakeholders in the reserve. MPs 11 and 12 include appropriate forms for recording fire management activities in the reserve.

Successful implementation of the prescribed burns in this plan requires trained personnel and special equipment. The equipment and level of expertise required for the crews carrying out prescribed burns is given in MP 8 in Appendix A. Minimum crew strengths are also specified.

Prescribed burns can be carried out by the Rural Fire Service, appropriately trained and equipped Council staff, or by contractors. If the prescribed burning is contracted out, the contractor must be able to meet the required training, crew and equipment levels specified in MP 8, as well as provide evidence of experience in carrying out ecosystem management burns.

Weed management before and after prescribed burns will require personnel trained in bush regeneration techniques.

**Figure 6 - Fire Management Units**

**Table 5 - Burning regimes for Gibbergunyah Reserve**

## **6.5 Monitoring And Evaluation**

Details of any prescribed burning or wildfires within the area covered by this fire management plan should be recorded according to MPs 11 and 12 in Appendix A, and entered in the Bushfire Risk Information Management System (BRIMS) operated by the Rural Fire Service.

### **6.5.1 Species of Conservation Value**

It is important that fires in the reserve do not negatively impact upon known populations of species of conservation value. In the absence of any specific information on the fire management requirements of a particular species or community of conservation value, this fire management plan aims to maintain the structure and floristics of the plant communities in which they occur. However, given the uncertainties in our knowledge of the fire ecology of many species, known populations of species of conservation value should be monitored for any changes in population size following wildfires and prescribed burns. Accurate mapping and estimation of existing population sizes followed by periodic recounts should be considered. The monitoring program should be developed in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service Threatened Species Unit.

### **6.5.2 Plant Community Structure**

A photographic record of the vegetation in each fire management unit should be set up to monitor major changes in plant community structure over time. Photos should be taken of a representative section of each fire management unit at the beginning of each 3-year period of the plan. Photos should be taken from the same location in each unit and show the same area of bushland. This will require a marked vantage point in each unit, and specifications as to the film type and camera settings to be used. Ideally the same focal length setting should be used throughout the monitoring period.

### **6.5.3 Performance Indicators**

The management action summary in Section 8 includes performance indicators for actions, or groups of actions, recommended to meet the objectives of the fire management plan. Desired outcomes for prescribed burns are given in the prescriptions in MP 8 in Appendix A, and in Table 5. The performance indicators should be used to determine if the specific objectives of this fire management plan have been achieved. They should be monitored every 5 years during the operation of the plan. Where performance targets are not being achieved, a review of the relevant portion of the plan should be undertaken.

### 6.5.4 Review of the Fire Management Plan

Minor reviews should be undertaken approximately every 5 years, and when any of the triggers listed in Table 6 are encountered. A full review of the fire management plan should be undertaken after all the burns prescribed for the fifth 3-year period of the plan have been completed.

The review should include:

- an audit to ascertain if procedures have been properly carried out and performance targets have been achieved
- a review of contemporary fire management and fire ecology literature to incorporate the latest information into the plan
- comparison of the condition of burnt and unburnt fire management units
- assessment of any changes in plant community structure as a result of fire
- preparation of a revised fire management plan to cover the next 15 years.

**Table 6 - Fire management plan revision procedures**

ASSESSMENT	REVIEW TRIGGER	RECOMMENDED ACTION
Monitoring of wildfires in the reserve.	Wildfire burns more than half of any single fire management unit.	Consider the whole unit to have been burnt and reschedule the next prescribed burn according to the optimal fire frequency given in Table 1.
Monitoring of wildfires in the reserve	Wildfire burns more than 50% of the fire management units in any single year.	Completely revise the burning schedule.
Flora and fauna surveys or incidental recordings.	Threatened species considered sensitive to fire recorded in the reserve.	Revise the burning prescription and/or burning schedule to ensure that the newly identified threatened species is/are not adversely affected.
At the end of each 3-year period check that each burn has produced the desired outcomes.	Burning prescription not producing the desired outcomes.	Revise burning prescription based on information recorded during the burn to ensure outcomes can be achieved.
General weed monitoring.	Post-fire weed treatment has not been successful in controlling target weeds.	Carry out follow-up treatments until target weeds are under control.
Review of ecological literature.	Research shows that the optimal fire frequencies for particular plant communities or threatened species needs revision.	Revise burning schedules for the fire management units containing the particular species or plant community.

## 6.6 Maintaining Records

### 6.6.1 Annual Update

The following items should be inspected annually at the beginning of the bushfire season (September) and the maps and information tables in the fire management plan updated if required:

- condition of vehicle access points and gates
- condition of fire trails and any new trails
- condition of fire hydrants and markers
- assets at risk from fires (delete assets no longer present and add new assets).

### 6.6.2 Update After Fires

After each prescribed burn or wildfire in the area covered by this fire management plan, details of the burn should be entered in the Bushfire Risk Information Management System (BRIMS), and the extent of the burn and the date should be entered in a data base maintained by Wingecarribee Shire Council (see Management Procedure 12 in Appendix A).

## 6.7 Adaptive Management

It is recommended that an 'adaptive management' approach be adopted for the implementation of this plan. Although this plan incorporates current knowledge on the impacts of fire on specific flora and fauna species and different plant communities, none of this knowledge is specific to Gibbergunyah Reserve. It is therefore difficult to predict the effect of the management actions recommended in this plan, particularly the prescribed burning program, on the ecosystems in Gibbergunyah Reserve, or on individual flora and fauna species.

Adaptive management utilises an experimental approach to land management where full scientific knowledge is lacking but where immediate management actions are required. For the adaptive management approach to work, the management plan will have to be run as an experiment with the following steps:

### **Model (hypothesis)**

This is the aim of the experiment and can be stated as:

- To apply a specific fire regime to the various plant communities in the reserve that will maintain their distribution, structure and floristics, as at 2004, in the long-term.
- To maintain the populations of indigenous fauna in the reserve.
- To reduce the distribution and abundance of introduced species in the native plant communities in the reserve.



**Test**

The test is the implementation of the plan.

**Collect Relevant Data**

The performance indicators in the summary table in Section 8 of this plan are designed to monitor the effectiveness of the implementation of the plan, rather than its impacts. However it should be noted that if the plan is not being implemented effectively it will be more difficult to analyse and draw useful conclusions from the monitoring program.

In order to run this 'experiment', baseline data of sufficient accuracy for resampling and statistical analysis must be collected. This could be expensive and it is suggested that the assistance of the University of Wollongong be sought for the detailed design of the 'experiment', including data collection and analysis. Data collection could be undertaken by students and/or interested community groups, if properly supervised.

**Analyse**

Data collected will need to be analysed in such a way that it will indicate where changes in the plan are required.

**Feed back**

Use of the monitoring results to improve the plan is the essential component of adaptive management. This will allow the plan to be progressively improved so that it is more closely linked to the actual conditions in the reserve.

## 7. Further Research

Apart from the adaptive management approach used in this plan there are also opportunities to use the fire management activities recommended in the plan as the basis for specific research projects. There has been a great deal of research into bushfires in Australia over the years. Initially the emphasis was on understanding fire behaviour, but recently more emphasis has been placed on fire ecology, and particularly the effects of fire on native flora and fauna, and native ecosystems. However, most of these studies have only been short-term, and Whelan (1995) states that: "There are very few long-term experimental studies of the effects of fire on any level of organisation - individual organism, population or community". Whelan goes on to state that: "The need for validation of models of long-term change based on short-term studies is becoming urgent". Valid models of long-term change will obviously contribute greatly to effective fire management in bushland reserves. However, even if new studies are begun today, useful results may not be available for decades, and even then may not be applicable to the situation in Gibbergunyah Reserve.

As noted in Section 6.7, the fire management activities in this plan are based on current scientific knowledge, however, they also provide an opportunity for research into the problems of managing fire hazard while at the same time maintaining the aesthetic, nature conservation and recreational values of the reserve. The results of any such research would be directly applicable to the management of Gibbergunyah and similar reserves.

Potential research topics that could be based on the fire management activities recommended in the plan include:

- effects of fires on weeds in different native plant communities
- methods of controlling specific weeds using fire, or incorporating fire into an overall weed control strategy
- comparison of the effects on particular ecosystems of low intensity verses high intensity burning
- methods for creating fuel modified buffer zones which minimise environmental impact, and to what extent natural environments can be retained in these zones

The monitoring program outlined in this strategy should provide good data for many of these studies.

## 8. Management Action Summary

The management actions recommended in this plan have been summarised and classified using the following criteria:

- URGENT** - Actions required to reduce a very high risk to life or property.
- ESSENTIAL** - Actions required to improve safety, or inadequate fire protection measures in high risk areas.
- Actions that are essential for control & suppression of wildfires, and/or conservation of threatened species.
- RECOMMENDED** - Actions required to improve inadequate fire protection measures in moderate risk areas.
- Actions required to ensure on-going effective fire management, or conservation of biodiversity.
- ROUTINE** - Maintenance of fire control resources and protection measures.

Urgent actions need to be undertaken as soon as possible.

Where applicable the desirable timing of other actions has been coded as follows:

- A - Inspect and maintain annually, or as specified in the relevant MP
- A/S - Timing as specified in the fire management plan
- 1, 2, etc - Carry out action within the time period specified (years)
- 1A, 2A etc - Construct within the next 1, 2 etc years and then inspect and maintain annually, or as specified in the relevant MP.

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# ***Glossary***

The following descriptions of bushfire related terms used in this plan are taken or adapted from:

Australian Fire Authorities Council (1996) *Glossary of Rural Fire Terminology*

Forestry Tasmania (undated) *Fuel Reduction Burning; Course Notes*.

NSW National Reserves and Wildlife Service (2002) *Fire Management Manual*.

NSW Department of Bushfire Services (2001) *Planning for Bushfire Protection*.

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Warringah/Pittwater Bush Fire Management Committee (1994) *Draft Fuel Management Plan*.

### **Asset Protection Zone**

An area of managed fuel around a dwelling or asset at risk that reduces the risk of damage by fire. It consists of an Inner Protection Area and an Outer Protection Area.

### **Backburning**

A fire started intentionally along the inner edge of a fire control line to consume the fuel in the path of a wildfire. This is usually the only method for controlling large wildfires, or fires of high intensity.

### **Bushfire**

A fire burning in plantations, forests, mallee, grasslands and other vegetation types. Usually classified as either a 'wildfire' or a 'prescribed fire'.

### **Bushfire Hazard**

Synonymous with static risk, a relative assessment of the potential intensity, and therefore the difficulty of controlling and suppressing a bushfire in an area. Bushfire hazard is a function of slope, and vegetation type.

### **Bushfire Prone**

Refers to the potential for the vegetation in an area to carry a bushfire at reasonable frequencies.

### **Bushfire Risk**

Bushfire risk is the probability of a wildfire starting, spreading and causing damage to an asset.

### **Fine Fuel**

Live and dead plant matter (including grasses, bracken, leaves, bark, and twigs and branches) less than 6 mm in diameter. Fine fuel is what burns at the fire front and contributes directly to fire behaviour. Increasing fine fuel loads increases the rate of spread and intensity of fire fronts.

### **Fire Break**

Any natural or constructed discontinuity in a fuel bed used to segregate, stop, and control the spread of a wildfire, or to provide a fire control line from which to suppress a fire.

**Fire Control Line**

A natural or constructed barrier, or treated fire edge, used in fire suppression and prescribed burning to limit the spread of a fire. Fire control lines can include constructed trails, roads, cleared areas and environmental features such as watercourses and rock outcrops.

**Fire Danger Rating (FDR)**

A relative number denoting an evaluation of rate of spread, or suppression difficulty for specific combinations of fuel, fuel moisture and wind speed. FDRs range from 1 (low danger) to 100 (extreme danger). The FDR is used for general fire danger forecasting and is based on the expected behaviour of fires burning in eucalypt forest carrying a fuel loading of 12.5 tonnes per hectare and travelling over level to undulating ground.

**Fire Intensity**

The rate of energy output per unit length of fire perimeter, usually measured in kilowatts per metre. It is a function of the heat yield of the fuel (H), the weight of the fuel consumed (W), and the rate of spread of the fire (R) i.e.  $I = HWR$ .

**Fire Regime**

The pattern of fire occurrence within an area described by the frequency, intensity, and season of fire occurrence.

**Fuel Load**

The quantity of fine fuel in an area, usually measured in tonnes per hectare of dried fine fuel.

**Outer Protection Area**

A zone between an Inner Protection Area and a bushfire hazard that is maintained in a fuel reduced condition. Provision of an Inner and Outer Protection Area will ensure that there is a progressive reduction of fine fuel between a bushfire hazard and any combustible structures.

**Fuel Reduced Condition**

A condition where fine fuel is maintained below a maximum height of 100 mm in grasslands, or below 8 tonnes per hectare in other fuel types.

**Hazard Reduction**

Reduction of the average fuel load over an area by burning (prescribed burn or wildfire), chemical, mechanical, or manual means.

**Indigenous Vegetation**

A term used to describe the plant species and/or plant communities which occur naturally in a locality. The term 'indigenous' excludes Australian species from another locality or region, as well as non-native species, that have been introduced to a locality.



**Inner Protection Area**

An area between buildings, or other assets, and bushland, where fine fuels are maintained in a minimum fuel condition to ensure that there is insufficient fuel to carry a fire from the bushland to the asset (see minimal fuel conditions)

**Introduced Species**

Species of plants or animals that have been deliberately, or accidentally, brought to an area in which they did not naturally occur.

**Minimum Fuel Conditions**

A condition where fine fuels are minimised to the extent that the passage of a fire will be prevented or severely restricted. This generally requires the removal of dead fine fuel and control of live fuel, breaks in the continuity of any fuel, maintenance of a high moisture content in vegetation, or replacement of vegetation with roads, paths, etc.

**Outer Protection Area**

A zone between an Inner Protection Area and a bushfire hazard that is maintained in a fuel reduced condition. Provision of an Inner and Outer Protection Area will ensure that there is a progressive reduction of fine fuel between a bushfire hazard and any combustible structures.

**Prescribed Burn**

(Synonymous with prescribed fire, controlled burn, prescription burn, scheduled fire or management burn) The controlled application of fire under specified environmental conditions to a predetermined area, and at the time, intensity, and rate of spread required to attain planned resource management objectives. It is undertaken in specified environmental conditions.

**Spotting, Spot Fire**

Isolated fires started ahead of the main fire by sparks, embers, or other ignited material carried by the wind, sometimes to a distance of several kilometres.

**Wildfire**

A bushfire which is not burning according to management prescriptions or requirements.