

Who is responsible for managing fire risk on riparian land?

Landholders are responsible for ongoing fire management on both freehold riparian and licensed Crown frontage.

What else can you do to reduce fire risk on your property?

It is important to ensure that farm activities do not accidentally ignite a fire, especially during days of Severe, Extreme or Code Red fire danger.

Fuel management (such as mowing or slashing grass) and other preventative measures around key assets on your property will have a significant impact on your safety and survival from bushfire.

The CFA publication **On the Land** has lots of useful advice on fire management for farmers. It includes a checklist of 20 essential steps for what to do before the bushfire season (the checklist is also available at www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/fire-safety-on-the-farm).

Landholders should consult with the CFA to help identify the best ways to manage fire risk for their property.

More information

On the Land

Grassfires: Know how to protect yourself and your property

Can I or Can't I?

These documents and other useful publications about managing fire risk can be found at www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about/publications

Agency contacts

CFA Regional Vegetation Management Officers:

9262 8444

Catchment Management Authorities:

East Gippsland CMA	5152 0600
West Gippsland CMA	1300 094 262
Corangamite CMA	5232 9100
Glenelg Hopkins CMA	5571 2526
Wimmera CMA	5382 1544
Mallee CMA	5051 4377
North Central CMA	5448 7124
Goulburn Broken CMA	5822 7700
North East CMA	1300 216 513
Melbourne Water*	131 722

* *Melbourne Water is the waterway manager for the Port Phillip region*

Note: Information in this brochure is based on **Riparian Land and Bushfire: Resource Document** prepared by the CFA and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning in collaboration with CMAs. It provides more detailed information about fire behaviour and riparian land. See www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about/publications/

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RIPARIAN LAND AND BUSHFIRE



Cover photo: Revegetated riparian land, Boolarra, Gippsland.
Source: West Gippsland CMA

Riparian protection and improvement

Riparian land is land abutting waterways. Each year, the State Government's Waterway Management Program invests in riparian protection and improvement projects, through catchment management authorities (CMAs).

The projects involve CMAs working collaboratively with landowners to undertake works such as stock management fencing, revegetation, weed management and infrastructure to support off-stream stock watering.

Hundreds of kilometres of fencing have been erected along Victoria's waterways through the program each year for the last 15 years.



Riparian revegetation and off-stream stock watering.
Source: West Gippsland CMA

This work has many benefits to the community and landholders including improvements to water quality, stock management, riparian vegetation and river health.

Some landholders are concerned that vegetated riparian areas, including those revegetated through riparian management programs, pose a fire risk to their property.

Is riparian land a fire risk?

Riparian land typically poses a lower fire threat to a landholder's property, including to crops, livestock and built assets, than the threat posed by other parts of the landscape.

Any significant patch of vegetation situated close to assets may pose a fire threat. However, under low to moderate fire danger conditions, well-managed riparian vegetation, with limited grass and weed growth, is less likely than pasture or crops to

contribute to the spread of fire across a property or the wider landscape.

This is largely because:

- fire will spread more quickly in cured grass or crops compared with forest (provided there is only limited spotting)
- trees generally reduce wind speed and the rate and intensity of fire
- riparian areas occupy a relatively small proportion of the broader landscape.

Fire is also less likely to start in riparian land than other parts of the landscape, typically because it is not as prone to lightning strikes, may be remote from access for arsonists, has fuel too moist to burn and is sheltered from the wind and sun.

Cured pasture that is in close proximity would typically pose a greater threat to built assets (such as houses and farm buildings) than riparian land which is typically further away from assets.



Fire spread in the moister vegetated riparian area was limited compared to the adjacent pasture. Coliban River, Redesdale.
Photo taken post February 2009 fire. Source: North Central CMA

Is riparian land a fire wick?

Riparian areas do not typically act as a 'wick' or 'fuse'. Fire will burn most rapidly in the direction of the wind (while continuing to spread more slowly sideways) or slope if burning under lighter wind conditions. In riparian vegetation, the presence of trees and shrubs will slow the wind which, combined with the likely higher fuel moisture content, will slow the spread of fire compared to fire in the neighbouring exposed grass or crops that are open to the wind.

Where the wind is aligned with vegetated riparian land within an area of cured grass or crops, the fire is likely to spread more quickly in the grass and crops abutting the riparian land than in the riparian land itself.

What about extreme fires?

In extreme fire events, such as the February 2009 fires, all vegetation can burn. In these situations, riparian areas will have less influence on fire spread and impacts than the landscape level grass and forest fuels.

What about riparian protection and improvement projects?

Narrow vegetated areas which are remote from assets typically present less bushfire risk. This applies to most riparian projects which are relatively narrow strips of revegetation, which are typically distant from the main farm assets.

Managing fire risk associated with riparian protection and improvement

Although the fire risk posed by riparian vegetation is lower than adjacent agricultural land, good fire planning and management are essential in riparian management activities.

When undertaking riparian management works, issues which must be considered include:

- long term weed management
- setbacks from the riparian land to built assets (such as houses and sheds)
- providing access points at strategic locations within the riparian land for emergency services, particularly to access reliable water supplies for tankers. This access is also necessary for managing the riparian land.

Landholders should discuss these issues with the CMA, Country Fire Authority (CFA) and/or other land management agencies involved when undertaking riparian works.

