

Cultural burning – join us for a fireside chat in chilly Canberra



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Dean Freeman is a Wiradjuri man who has worked in fire management for over twenty years, and has crew leader responsibilities for hazard reduction burns and wildfires. He is leading a cultural burning program that is being developed at the ACT Parks and Conservation Service in partnership with local Traditional Owners who have a particular interest in fire.

“In Australia, the way we look at fire is that it will kill us, because we’ve had so many natural disasters. But the whole of fire is important, not just the danger, and you can work with it in many different ways. Fire is useful for hunting, cooking, and keeping warm. Having respect for fire is the ultimate key to being safe.” DF

ACT Parks and Conservation have always used fire for hazard reduction and land management. The cultural burning program is introducing new ideas and approaches to this work and more. The timing of a cultural burn might be at different times of the year and the day. The way the fire is planned is also different, taking a mosaic approach.

“With cultural burns, we put one dot down and let it burn as far as it can – bringing fire from a central point out. This allows everything to escape that is in the area, small animals and bigger game. With hazard reduction burns, we generally light a perimeter in a horseshoe shape, and let it burn in. In that scenario, some animals escape but there is not as much freedom, not as many escape routes.” DF

Burning land – for whatever purpose – requires engaging with complex interactions between climate change, life in all its forms, settlement patterns, and disturbed and degraded ecologies. At the same time, it requires talking about our values: what we are burning and why. In Canberra there is a dynamic conversation well underway about the traditional land management practices of government departments, private land holders, the community and diverse Aboriginal peoples.

ACT Parks and Conservation are contributing to a BNHCRC research project that is interested in what policy and practice can learn from such engagements in southern Australia. For more information, see the ‘Hazards, Culture, and Indigenous Communities’ research project on the BNHCRC website, or contact Dr Jessica Weir: j.weir@westernsydney.edu.au



The first cultural burn conducted by ACT Parks and Conservation was in 2015 at Jerrabomberra Wetlands, on the eastern edge of Lake Burley Griffin. This was called a cultural ecological burn. **Above:** Uncle Carl Brown lighting the fire, with Adam Leavesley, Adrian Brown and Dean Freeman. **Top left:** Burning the blackberry. **Left:** Afterwards, the native sedge grew back stronger than the blackberry.



Murumbung Ranger Kie Barrett taking coals from the fire up to ignite a cultural burn at Gibraltar Rocks.



Gungaharra grasslands: the broken fuel line of this cultural burn allows for small animal escape routes.



Training with Murumbung Rangers at Jerrabomberra Wetlands, Krystal Hurst and Dean Freeman.



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