

20 June 2017

Kerstin Stender
Trails Coordinator
Department of Parks and Wildlife
Locked Bag 104
Bentley Delivery Centre WA 6983

Dear Kerstin

Timing and notification of prescribed burns

The Bibbulmun Track Foundation acknowledges that prescribed burns are an essential part of park management and that the weather is a major factor in when burns can be undertaken.

However, we are writing to request that, when burns are going to impact on the Bibbulmun Track, longer lead times are given and some level of consultation is undertaken with the Foundation to try and mitigate the negative impact on walkers.

Example impacts of a prescribed burn

On Friday 24 March 2017 the Foundation was advised that a significant diversion in the Darling Range would be in place within the week for potentially two to three months.

This was just prior to Easter - a peak period for walkers. Many would have made plans to walk on the closed section during the holiday period. As the planned closure was long with no specific dates for burns some would have chosen to ignore the closure and walked regardless.

Impact upon End-to-enders

End-to-enders would be very disappointed that, after many months of planning and anticipation, they will miss a large section of such a spectacular part of the Track. The impacts include: changes to itinerary, food rations and of course walking along gravel roads frequently used by trail bikes and other vehicles (Dale Rd).

Those coming from interstate or overseas do not have the luxury of postponing their walk to return and walk that section. Smaller closures do not have such an impact but missing such a large portion is a big deal for an end-to-ender.

Impact upon Groups

Groups that have planned their walk for months and lodged NOIs are affected by such large closures – especially at short notice. Schools have to start again with planning and approvals which take time, money and effort. A small burn with one temporary campsite is not usually an issue but a large closure which results in a three or four day program becoming a two-day program has a significant impact.

Impact upon the Foundation

- Cancellation of our events means loss of income and a great deal of extra admin time contacting everyone, giving refunds, handling disappointed customers etc. Three events would have been cancelled if this burn had proceeded when initially planned.
- Contacting end-to-enders (that we were aware of due to trip-planning) and spreading the word to all potential walkers via social media and website.
- Dealing with extra walker enquiries and of course the large number of complaints from walkers via social media, email, in person and on the phone.
- Contacting all the groups that have submitted an NOI.

Impact upon volunteers

Many maintenance volunteers use the Easter break to visit their section.

Impact on the quality of the experience

It is thought that the Bibbulmun Track used to be used as the boundary of a prescribed burn, negating the need for so many closures and diversions, whereas now the burns go right across the Track.

Walking long, usually much less attractive diversions, detracts from the overall experience for walkers. When the signage is out of date, in the wrong place or unclear it can cause additional stress.

The extent of recent burning along the whole trail, coupled with recent bushfires means that it is possible for someone to walk through burnt forest for successive days.

Impact upon DPaW

The reputation, trust in, and perception of competency of the Department is severely degraded when large closures are made without a perceived consideration to walkers. The outrage and disappointment on social media caused by the Darling Range closure was largely directed at the Department.

The Bibbulmun Track is widely promoted as world-class and our log-book data shows that walkers from around the world travel to WA to walk it.

We hope that the Department will work with the Foundation to uphold this reputation and try to mitigate the negative impacts of prescribed burning on the Track.

Kind regards

Linda Daniels
Executive Director