

Dieback Hygiene and DRA Permits

The forest disease 'dieback' is a significant ecological problem, and precautions must be taken to prevent the infection of healthy forest.

In this factsheet, we cover:

- How to identify where precautions are necessary
- Standard dieback hygiene precautions for volunteers
- Acquiring and using a permit to enter Dieback Risk Area

What is 'Dieback'?

Dieback is a disease of plants. The form we see locally is caused by a microscopic fungus within the soil, which infects the roots of susceptible plant species. In Western Australia, *Phytophthora cinnamomi* is the most common and destructive of the fungal pathogens. The infection rots the roots, stops water and nutrients getting to the leaves and branches, and can ultimately kill the plant through a top-down progression.



In the south-west of WA, 40% of our native species are susceptible, including jarrah, banksias, grass trees, zamia palms. Where an infection impacts a whole patch of forest, dieback appears as if the plants are dying of drought.

The ecological consequences of dieback include habitat loss (at micro and macro scales) and changes to the species diversity and composition of bushland. A decrease in native shrubs and trees allows the promotion of grasses and weeds are promoted.

The effects of dieback in the forest (Image from *Phytophthora Dieback Atlas*, DEC, 2006).

More information about *Phytophthora* dieback can be found at (links):

- [DBCA website page: Plant Diseases – Phytophthora dieback](#)
- [Dieback Working Group website](#)

How do we protect healthy forest?

Phytophthora is easily carried by water above or below the ground. It naturally spreads by movement through the soil or in water run-off. However, human activity can significantly and rapidly expand the range of infection.

Spread is promoted by any movement of soil from infected forest, agricultural areas or domestic gardens. Your own garden may have dieback infection, even if it is not obvious. Soil can be moved by vehicles (cars, bikes etc.), horses, on footwear and on tools. Damp soil adheres more readily – the risk of inadvertent movement is greater where the soil is relatively waterlogged or recently wet by rainfall.

The most useful thing we can do to help slow the spread of infection is therefore to limit the movement of potentially infected soil. We can:

- Stay out of infected (and at-risk) areas completely.
- Make sure we don't transfer soil from elsewhere on vehicle, footwear or tools.
- Try to avoid walking or driving through puddles or muddy areas.
- Clean our footwear and tools periodically while moving through the forest.

How are high risk areas identified?

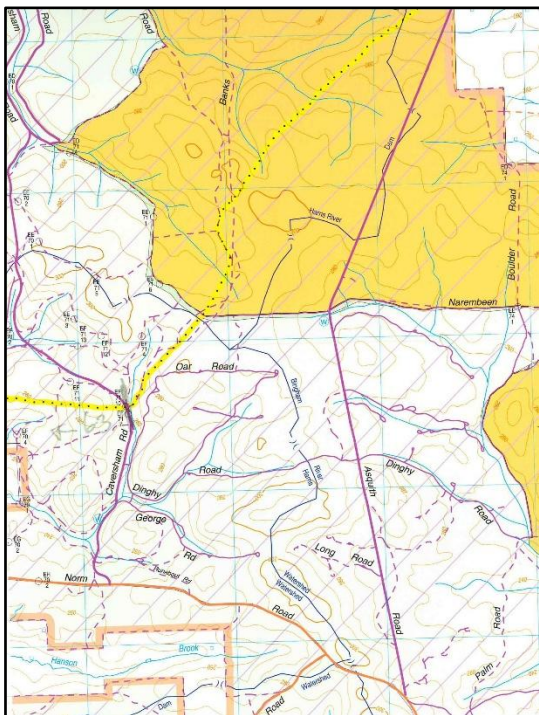
Areas of public land that have been identified as being ***at risk from the impacts of dieback***¹ are proclaimed as ***Disease Risk Area (DRA)***².

Disease Risk Area is explicitly identified on the Bibbulmun Track maps. The boundary of DRA is a thick coloured line, and the interior is indicated by regular diagonal lines (see map key). Sometimes a public road crosses DRA – these roads are built and managed to limit the spread of infection. Other roads are closed to the public (restricted access), so that activities with associated risk of spreading infection may be controlled.

On the maps, the depiction of several elements has changed between editions, including the distinction between public and restricted access roads. For example, here is the same area (just north of Harris Dam campsite, Map 3) on a map printed in 2010 and the newer version printed in 2021.

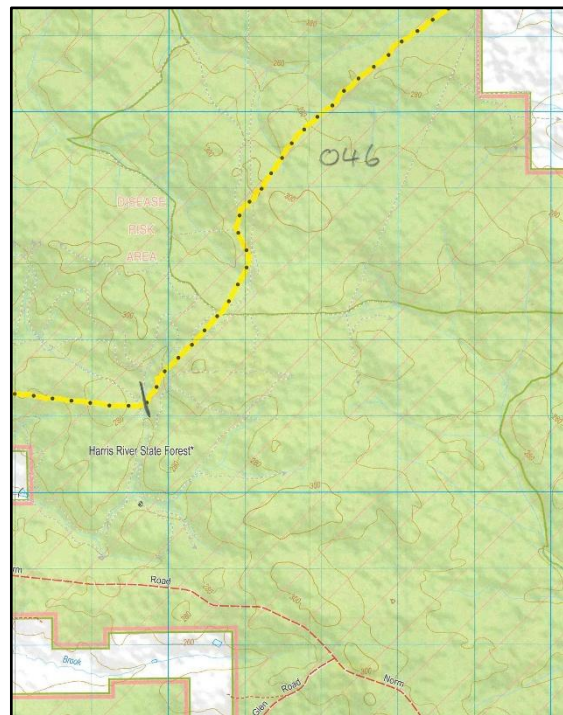
2010 edition:

- DRA boundary: Pinkish-orange
- DRA interior (diagonals): Purple
- Public roads: Red
- Restricted access roads and tracks: Purple



2021 edition:

- DRA boundary: Pink
- DRA interior (diagonals): Pink
- Public roads: Black or Red
- Restricted access roads and tracks: Faint grey (obscure)



Under the State Government Forest Management Regulations, vehicle entry to DRA³ requires a written, appropriately signed permit issued by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA).

To prevent unauthorised vehicle entry to DRA, designated public vehicle access points are identified and shown on maps. For an overview of designated access points, go to www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au/trip-planner/track-conditions/ and scroll down to “Dieback and Bibbulmun Track access”.

How do volunteer DRA permits work?

Where vehicle access to your Track maintenance section requires entry to DRA, we can give you the necessary authority via a permit issued by the Parks and Wildlife Service of DBCA (PaWS).

Permits are renewed annually (at the beginning of July), or as required. Each PaWS District issues their own version of the permit. For Perth Hills and Blackwood Districts, every vehicle is explicitly listed on the permit. The Wellington District permit is not so specific.

We will ask you for the Registration, Make, Model and Colour of the vehicle/s you are likely to use for Track maintenance trips. If any of your vehicle details ever change, please get in touch so we can arrange for an updated permit.

The permit should be printed and carried in your vehicle. Display it on the dash of your parked vehicle when you are doing Track maintenance. Where vehicles are individually listed, make sure the row listing your vehicle is visible (i.e. Perth Hills and Blackwood Districts). You may need to print the permit in single-sided format (where it extends into a second page) to allow both/all pages to be fully displayed.

Permits always have standard conditions attached:

- Do not enter DRA within three days since rain
- Ensure your vehicle is 'clean on entry' (see below)
- Use only the roads/tracks agreed between DBCA and the BTF

In Wellington and Blackwood Districts, you are also asked to notify the District office in advance of your intention to enter DRA. See the factsheet ***Preparation for a maintenance trip*** for further information.

Dieback hygiene – What do I need to think about?

To protect our forests, all maintenance volunteers should observe standard dieback hygiene practices – even if your section is not associated with DRA.

Before your visit:

- Make sure that your boots and tools are cleaned of any traces of soil from home garden or previous walks
- Prepare a small cleaning and disinfectant kit, including:
 - A small, firm-bristled cleaning brush (to remove soil from boots and tools)
 - A spray bottle with methylated spirit (70% in water).



During your visit:

- Keep to the Track – do not veer off unnecessarily.
- Avoid walking through muddy areas unnecessarily.
- Use your cleaning kit to clean and disinfect your boots on entry and exit to any DRA. Brush off as much soil as possible then spray liberally with methylated spirits.
- Use boot cleaning stations (where installed). See the factsheet ***Boot cleaning stations***.
- If your work involves getting soil on your tools, clean them before moving on. Brush off as much soil as possible then spray liberally with methylated spirits.



When taking a vehicle into DRA (with the authority of a permit):

- Do not enter DRA within three days since rain. Damp soil adheres more readily to tyres and the underside of the vehicle.
- Ensure your vehicle is 'clean on entry'. This means that the vehicle is free of noticeable soil, mud and plant material on the tyres, underside, floors and floor mats.

You should be concerned about this if your vehicle has been off-road (if you usually drive on bitumen roads only, the risk is insignificant).

See **Dieback Hygiene** (on the DBCA website) for a helpful checklist available to download as a pdf.

- Once you enter DRA and leave public roads, use the most direct route to your section access point/s.
- Do not travel within DRA other than to access and return from your section.
- Avoid driving through puddles unnecessarily.



Notes:

¹ This is not necessarily the same thing as confirmed occurrence or confirmed absence of *Phytophthora* infection.

² Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (2023) *Phytophthora Dieback Management Manual (v1.3)*, Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Perth.

³ Entry to DRA – here the phrase is used to mean driving on restricted access roads and tracks; all other references imply that interpretation. As stated above, some public, freely accessible roads also run through DRA.