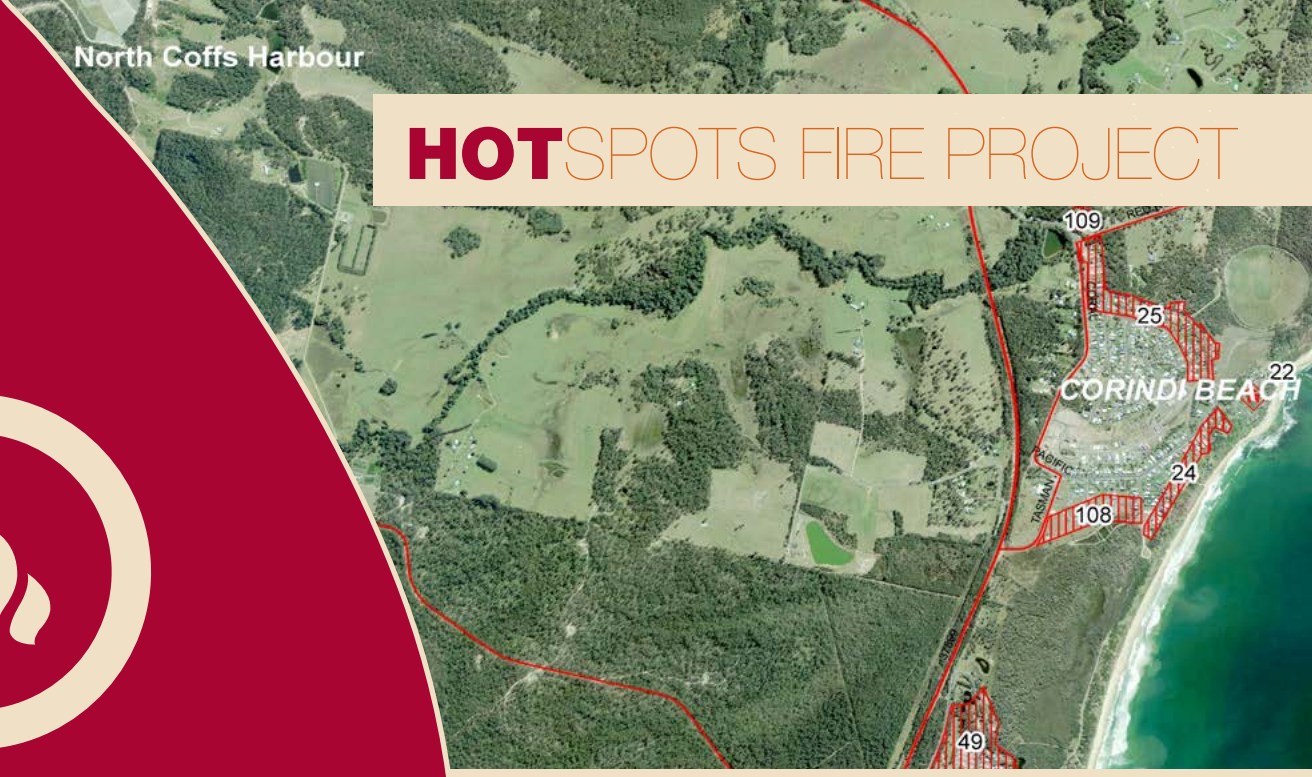

HOTSPOTS FIRE PROJECT

Case Study: Improving Community Safety in the Corindi Valley

Hotspots achieves hazard reduction and community engagement outcomes for Corindi landholders

Mitigating the Risk

With a history of frequent high intensity bush fires, the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS), Nature Conservation Council of NSW and several partner agencies, worked together to deliver community engagement and hazard reduction activities in the Corindi area, reducing the level of bush fire risk, whilst building relationships between landholders and agencies.

Working hand-in-hand with the Mid-North Coast RFS district and State Mitigation Support Services, other agencies and landholders, the Corindi Hotspots Program has achieved on-ground risk management outcomes affording better protection to the community and at the same time improving biodiversity values. Hotspots ran two workshops with landholders, covering information on risk and biodiversity, developing a fire management plan and how to plan and conduct a small prescribed burn. As a result of the program, several Hazard Reduction Certificates (HRCs) applications were received by district and hazard reduction activities were carried out with assistance from State Mitigation Support Services (SMSS) (see map below for activities).

Mitigation activities in the Corindi area

TWO HOTSPOTS WORKSHOPS

- 33 landholders from diverse backgrounds
- 22 Fire Management Plans covering 1677 hectares
- 12 Hazard Reduction Certificate Applications
- 6+ hazard reduction burns, with RFS assistance at 4 burns
- 5+ APZ mechanical works
- Monitoring program for North Coast Emu
- Firewise training and Bush Fire Survival Plans completed
- Compliments future development of the Red Rock Community Protection Plan

The community engagement and hazard reduction activities were put to the test when several bush fires threatened the community of Corindi in 2012.

"Knowing that there are treatments that can be done to minimise the loss of assets is a great thing."

Corindi participant

Hotspots Program tested during the 2012 Fire Season

The Upper Sherwood Creek Fire, which started on the 27th of August 2012 burnt an area of 113 hectares. Approximately 30 hectares burnt on one Hotspots participants' property. Prior to the fire, RFS staff had undertaken a property assessment following on from the Hotspots workshop, and internal tracks had been identified to be used for future control lines for a planned burn. These tracks were used to contain the bush fire, and minimise the spread onto neighbouring properties.

Bush fire returned to the Corindi landscape two months later. The Plum Pudding Fire started on the 20th October 2012 (four months after Workshop 2 of the Hotspots program) within the Conglomerate State Forest. This bush fire had the potential to destroy life and property as well as damaging threatened species habitats and rainforest. The fire burnt for nine days, covering an area just over 1000 hectares. A number of Hotspots participants living on Murphy's road were informed of the fire.

By having prepared and implemented their property fire management plans, fire fighting agencies were able to take into account the hazard reduction works undertaken in their operational planning and bush fire suppression. Established relationships between landholders and fire fighting agencies led to a rapid response to the bush fire attack.

Not just another community engagement program...

This Hotspots Program was significant, as it provided a base for a strategic mitigation program to be developed and implemented, which had direct benefits to landholders in the following fire season.

As a result of Hotspots, the community were better able to make decisions and take responsibility during the bush fires, working together with their neighbours and fire agencies. They are better prepared for bush fire, and are undertaking actions for hazard reduction and biodiversity.

One of the main goals as part of a coordinated strategy was working with landholders to understand their level of risk, whilst also gaining knowledge of biodiversity and cultural values in their local area.

The Hotspots Program has resulted in greater community trust with the RFS and other public land managers and compliments the development of the Community Protection Plan for the isolated hamlet of Red Rock.

"We believe the program is a sensible approach... we are able to have a well maintained property to protect us against the threat of fire"

Corindi Participant

The Corindi Valley

The Corindi Valley sits between Coffs Harbour and Yamba on the NSW Mid North Coast. It is within the traditional lands of the Gumbaynggirr people and the dominant land uses are grazing, horticulture, forestry and lifestyle farms. Landholders are drawn to the Corindi Valley for many reasons – beautiful forests, great beaches, productive farmland, fabulous views and a secluded and quiet lifestyle - and they live with bush fire risk every day.

Corindi is identified as '*Extreme Risk*' in the Mid North Coast Bush Fire Risk Management Plan. It has a history of significant high-intensity bush fires. Historically, these fires have led to the loss of houses and structures, and have damaged major horticultural assets. Additionally, there are large areas of plantations and national parks which could be adversely impacted by broad-scale high intensity fires.

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Further Information

Visit www.hotspotsfireproject.org.au or contact the Hotspots Fire Project on 02 8741 5555 (NSW Rural Fire Service), email hotspots@rfs.nsw.gov.au or 02 9516 0359 (Nature Conservation Council of NSW), email info@hotspotsfireproject.org.au

Credits

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Photographs: NSW RFS and Jamie Bertram

We would like to thank our project partners for their ongoing commitment to the Hotspots Program