

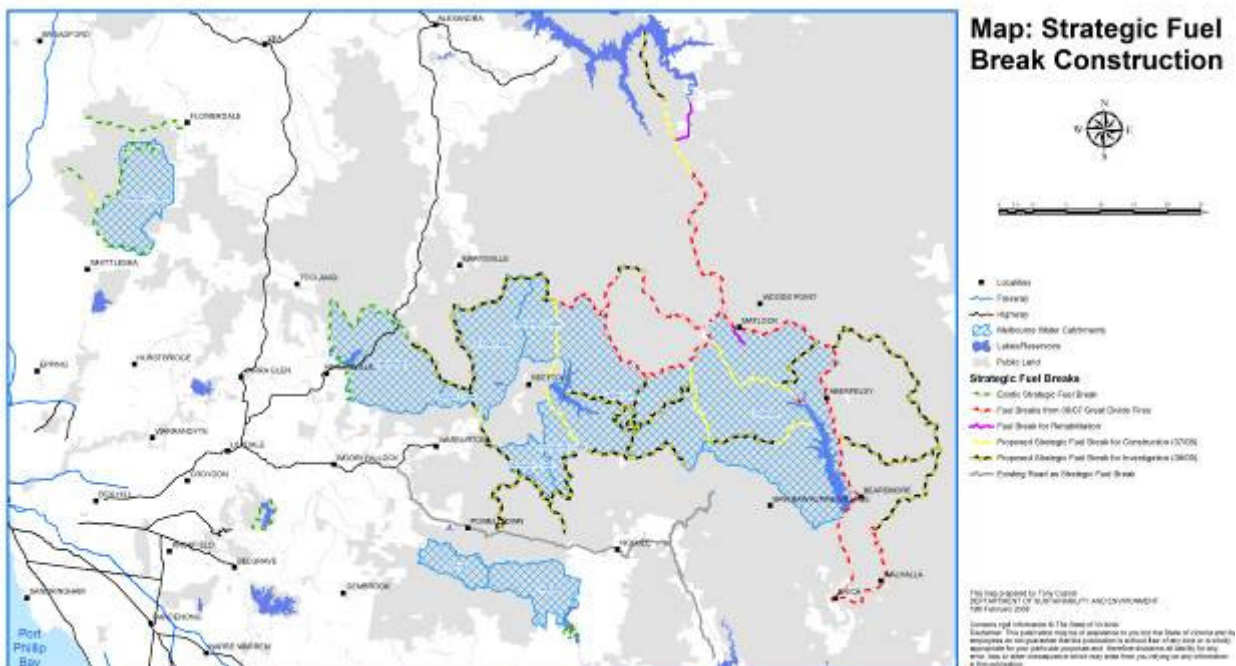
Strategic fuelbreaks

protecting Melbourne's precious water supply

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water are working together to protect Melbourne's world class water supply. Melbourne's water catchments provide drinking water for more than 4 million people. A network of around 600km of fuelbreaks is being constructed to help protect these invaluable forest catchments from the threat of wildfire.

What's happening?

350kms of fuelbreaks were built to protect the Thomson and Upper Yarra Catchment during the Great Divide Fire 2006/7. These fuelbreaks are being maintained in readiness for the fire season. Additional fuelbreaks in and surrounding the catchments have undergone environmental and cultural assessments, approvals, design planning and consultation. These fuelbreaks will be constructed over the next two years.



Why is this being done?

The water catchments in our forest areas to the east and north of Melbourne produce 90% of Melbourne Water's water supply, 80% of which originates in wet forest types. It is essential to protect the catchments from wildfire, as the loss of forest from wildfire would affect water quality, and in the longer term reduce the amount of water in our reservoirs.

What will the breaks look like?

The breaks will generally be 20 metres wide. In most areas, 30% canopy cover from over-storey trees will be retained to provide shade and connection of trees for wildlife. Vegetation coverage will be retained on the ground and annual maintenance slashing will be undertaken by Melbourne Water and DSE to maintain access.

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How will they be built?

The breaks are generally located on ridgelines and generally coincide with existing roads and tracks. Machinery is being used to clear most of the understorey and some of the larger trees from the width of the break. Large material will be assessed for commercial use and sold with the necessary licences and approvals. Material appropriate for firewood will be made available through the normal DSE firewood processes. Any remaining debris will be burnt or mulched.

Where are the breaks?

The breaks stretch from the Thomson catchment in the east through the Upper Yarra, Armstrong, O'Shannassy and Maroondah catchments to Wallaby Creek near Kinglake north of Melbourne. Also included are the smaller McMahons and Starvation catchments.

How will the fuelbreaks work?

The breaks will not stop a forward moving wildfire in extreme conditions. They will provide a safe and effective area from which back-burning can be undertaken. Critical fire-fighting time is saved if the strategic fuel breaks are in place. The network will provide an effective break in forest fuel and a well-prepared area to assist in fuel reduction burning programs.



How are environmental and cultural impacts managed?

All works on the fuelbreaks have been subject to full assessments for environmental and cultural impacts. The fuel breaks have met requirements under State and Federal Government legislation, particularly the *States Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1986*, *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* and the *Commonwealths Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

External specialists have made recommendations on fuelbreak design and work methods to limit disturbance to native flora and fauna and cultural heritage sites that are listed and therefore protected.

All work on the new fuelbreaks has been dependant on the completion of assessments and approvals. Works are regularly supervised to ensure management prescriptions are complied with.

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