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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – April 2019

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Hello everyone and welcome to this month's newsletter. Over this month, the major event that has affected the Park has been a bushfire which started on March 2nd in Yinnar South and travelled into the southern parts of the park. As a result Morwell National Park is closed and this resulted in the planned March activity being cancelled since the Park was closed.



There will be no activity report or John's Jottings this month and instead we will have a special edition reporting on the bushfire. They will both return next month.

We have two articles from the Latrobe Valley Express. The first is a general report upon the bushfire while the second is from an interview with Matt and Ken who both spoke about their concerns to the diversity of the flora in Morwell National Park. Maps showing the areas burnt by the bushfire comes from the Victorian Emergency website.

Friends of Morwell National Park Inc: PO Box 19, Churchill, 3842, <http://morwellnp.pangaeon.net>.

Official Address of FMNP - contactfmnp@gmail.com

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Yinnar South-Budgeree fire burns in Morwell National Park

A bushfire started near Yinnar South on Saturday 2nd March. At least two homes were destroyed with the fire burning more than 1900 hectares and was not yet under control at the time of publication.

An emergency warning was issued for people living in the affected areas (Budgeree, Budgeree East, Grand Ridge, Jeeralang, Jeeerlang Junction, Jeeralang North, Jumbuck, Yinnar, Yinnar South and Jumbuk Road), while the cause of the blaze is most likely lightning.

Up to 150 firefighters worked on the fire, mostly from Forest Fire Management's Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and Parks Victoria, as well as the CFA and HVP Plantations. More than 20 tankers, a dozen bulldozers, two water-bombing planes and two helicopters were used to fight the fire.

Fire crews had been working to protect houses under threat by fire near the south-west corner of the Morwell National Park after fire had been "slowly creeping" into the reserve overnight on Sunday. The weather conditions for the next two days were favourable for firefighters mainly due to "light winds of consistent direction". The following Wednesday saw 5-10mm of rain fall on the area.

During the fire incidents there were multiple road closures. In the days that followed many local schools closed including Yinnar preschool, the Gippsland campus of Federation University, the Warragul, Yallourn, Morwell and Traralgon campuses of Federation Training, Kurnai College's two Churchill campuses, Yinnar South, Yinnar, Churchill, Churchill North and Lumen Christi Primary School closed for two days.



(Edited from the Latrobe Valley Express 4/3/2019)

Morwell flora fire toll still unknown

Local naturalists are waiting to count the wildlife lost to the Yinnar South-Budgerie fire that burnt about one-fifth of Morwell National Park.

The bushfire that claimed two homes at Yinnar South is being treated as non-suspicious, with police saying on Friday it was caused by lightning.

Friends of Morwell National Park have fears the reserve will lose entire populations of plant species known to live in the southern section of the park burnt by fire.

"There's a number of small ground covers and little flowering plants that we have only recorded up that end of the park," Friends of Morwell National Park president Matt Campbell said.



"I know where they have pushed one of the containment lines in we possibly lost the powerful owl nest trees."

Forest Fire Management public information officer Carmel Henderson said the entire southern end of the park was burnt, except for the middle section which was a sensitive gully too green to burn.

Fire crews have bulldozed lines from west to east in the park to contain the fire but made handmade lines in the gully section.

Ms Henderson said on Friday the priority had been restoring power to homes and the extent of injured wildlife had not been correlated yet.

"All roads into the park ... are blocked and traffic management points are preventing entry to the

park until an assessment has been done for hazardous trees," she said.

Morwell National Park is primarily dry sclerophyll forest and is home to about 40 different species of native orchid, including the flying duck orchid and butterfly orchid.

It was created in 1967 after locals watched farmland encroach on the Strzelecki Ranges, Mr Campbell, a Jeeralang Junction resident, said.

He said the biggest concern was for Fosters Gully, which was spared from the fire.

"As far as its plant makeup and its importance goes, that can't be replaced. If that goes that would be disastrous for Morwell National Park," Mr Campbell said.

A founding member of the group Ken Harris said he was really fearful the fire would get into Foster's Gully but it stopped in time.

"The butterfly orchid which is the most special plant in whole park would be very severely damaged if not destroyed if a fire ever got into Foster's Gully. It looks it got within 200 metres," Mr Harris said.

"They're very uncommon in Victoria. There's a few at Wilson's Prom, there's a colony in Foster's Gully, there are a few in Dandenong Ranges and they've been so badly reduced they don't even let anyone know where they are."

Mr Campbell fled his home on Saturday but once the fire threat downgraded he returned home.

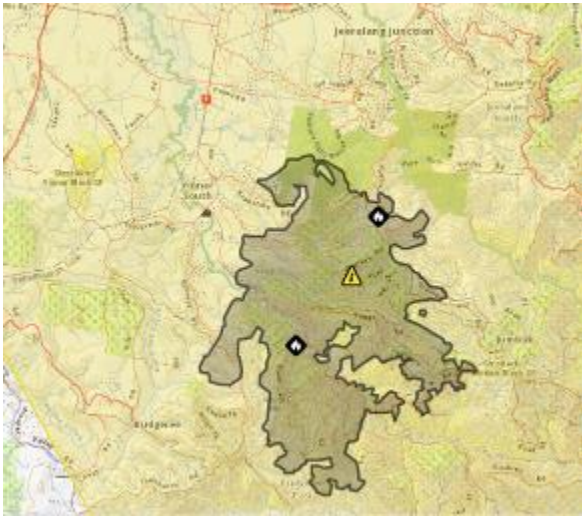
"It was quite amazing to come back, look out your window and there was a koala sitting in the tree drenched with rain, perfectly happy," he said.

He wanted to thank the CFA and all the fire crews who "don't seem to get the praise", including Parks Victoria, Forest Fire Management, Victoria Police, department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and HVP Plantations.

Friends of Morwell National Park expect to undertake track maintenance work once the park reopens.

(Latrobe Valley Express 11/3/2019)

A total of 1927 hectares were burnt. The bushfire entered the park through the southern boundary and burnt in the Silvertop Hill, Muttonwood Creek and Stringybark Ridge areas of the Park. The whole area burnt by the bushfire is shown on the map at the left while the affected areas of the Park are shown on the right.



Following are photos showing the damage in Morwell National Park from the Yinnar South-Budgeree bushfire.





These photos show some of the branches and trees down across Stringybark Ridge Track.



April Activity

Sunday 21st March 10.00am

The group will meet in the Kerry Road car park to complete track maintenance. This a change from the original calendar and is based on needing to do some post bushfire track work. The planned nesting box survey will be delayed to a future activity. You will need to bring your lunch along with clothing and footwear suitable for the weather conditions on the day.