**Aboriginal fire management**

The role of fire has a major influence on the Australian environment and has shaped many of the plant communities we see today. Before the arrival of non-Aboriginal people, Bininj managed their country with fire. Fires were lit all year round, although mostly in the early dry season. They were lit for many reasons: to make travelling easier; to flush out animals when hunting; to protect food resources such as yams from later fires; to clear around camp sites; to signal to others; and to fulfil spiritual and cultural obligations. These burning practices had the effect of promoting suitable habitats for a range of different plants and animals.

*This earth, I never damage.*
*I look after. Fire is nothing, just clean up.*
*When you burn, new grass coming up.*
*That means good animal soon,*
*might be goanna, possum, wallaby.*
*Burn him off, new grass coming up, new life all over.*
Bill Neidjie, Aboriginal traditional owner.

Fires lit by Bininj as they travelled to different parts of the country created a patchwork of burnt and unburnt areas. With the arrival of non-Aboriginal people, the Bininj population decreased. Many people died of disease, others moved off their land to towns and settlements. With fewer people on the land, less burning was carried out so hot, late dry season wildfires became more common. These hot fires were often large and destructive, changing the distribution of plants and animals. Each wet season monsoonal rains prompt rapid plant growth. During the dry season the vegetation dries out and large quantities of fuel accumulate. Since proclamation of the Park, Bininj and Park managers have worked together to reduce the number of hot fires at the end of the dry season. In the fire-sensitive stone country burning is used to reduce the amount of fuel along creeks. Firebreaks burnt around fire-sensitive communities such as monsoon forest, sandstone heath and mature paperbark forest help to protect the communities from later, hot wildfires.

*Controlled burning in Kakadu*

Traditional owners continue to burn country today.
Early in the dry season firebreaks are also burnt around art sites, buildings, camping areas and other permanent structures. Parts of the Park boundary are burnt to reduce the risk of fires entering or leaving the Park.

In the woodland areas traditional owners and Park staff light many cool fires from the ground and the air in the early dry season. This creates a patchwork of burnt and unburnt areas, which breaks up the country, helping to prevent large, destructive wildfires later in the season.

As the floodplains dry out burning is done to reduce fuel loads. Bininj hunting goannas and turtles also light fires on the floodplains late in the dry season.

Research and monitoring are integral to fire management in Kakadu. Much research has already been done at Munmarlary and Kapalga; future research will look at the effects of burning in fire-sensitive communities and in the wet season.

Continuing monitoring of the Park's fire-management program and its effectiveness involves ground observation, photographic points that show the effect of burning over time, and satellite mapping of fire scars.

**Reducing the risk of wildfires**

**Please help prevent wildfires by:**

making sure your cigarette butts and matches are out and putting them in rubbish bins, not on the ground;

using the fireplaces provided and, if non are provided, clearing the area around your campfire of any flammable material; always putting your fire out before you leave.