

MANAGING BUSHFIRE: DIVERSE VALUES, SHARED VISION? AN EVALUATION OF THE HOTSPOTS FIRE TRAINING PROJECT

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“The Hotspots Fire Project is a comprehensive training program which provides landholders and land managers with the skills and knowledge needed to actively and collectively participate in fire management planning and implementation for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity conservation.”
Hotspots Fire Project (undated)

There is a paucity of large-scale, replicated fire research and we know very little about the mechanisms underlying fire impacts on native species. Therefore, we are not yet in a position to manage fire for biodiversity conservation.
<http://fennergchool-research.anu.edu.au/malleefire/context/>

“If there is one example of an entity ... that is neither simply natural nor social but something else and beyond, it is fire. The agency of fire is very much an outcome of its relationships – with Aboriginal igniters, managers and extinguishers; with fuel load in different vegetation communities; with temperature, humidity and wind conditions.” (Head 2008)

Research Questions

1. What is sustainable fire management in theory and in practice?
2. How do relationships in the human/fire/land collective influence the use of fire to manage native vegetation on landholdings and across landscapes in New South Wales?
3. How does the Hotspots Fire Training Program influence the use of fire on landholdings and across landscapes?

Method

Hotspots is a fire training project that seeks to change the dynamics in the human/fire/land collective. Thinking in terms of a collective guides us to the agency of fire, plants and environmental factors, as well as people, in generating what we think of as ‘fire management’. Starting with areas of native vegetation on landholdings, I shall explore relevant networks of people, plants, animals, abiotic factors, texts and places (after Whatmore, 2002). My methods will include literature review, photographic and narrative description of native vegetation areas, observation of training and prescribed burns, interviews with and surveys of participants from previous courses and case study of up to five participants on current courses.

Significance

There is a lack of research into private landholders in NSW using fire to manage land. Hotspots is a novel project in seeking to influence this practice. Thus, this study is significant in exploring both existing practice and an attempt to influence this practice.

Previous research from both the sciences and humanities has abstracted fire from (at least some of) its relationships, denying the agency of either human or non-human actors. This study is further significant in putting these relationships back into understanding how ‘sustainable fire management’ comes to be thought about, talked about and practised, and its socio-ecological consequences.

References

- Head, L. (2008). "Is the concept of human impacts past its use-by date?" *The Holocene* **18**(3): 373-377.
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Whatmore, S. (2002). *Hybrid Geographies: Natures, Cultures, Places*. Sage.

Photographs: Hotspots

