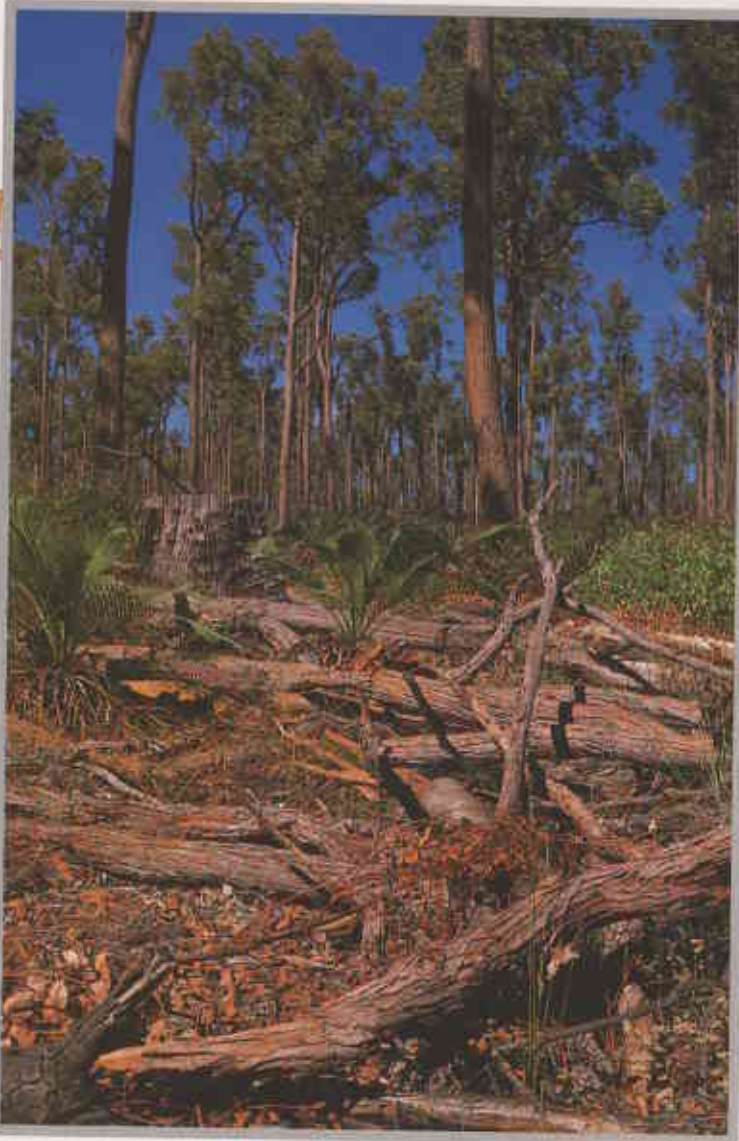


# FIREW



John Green

*the  
burning  
issue*

*by Steve Slavin*

**THE** WIND IS HOWLING and rain is pelting onto the roof, but a crackling wood fire and the warm glow of flames dancing on logs soon takes the chill off the wintery night air.

Down through history, fire has provided warmth and light. So it's hardly surprising that despite the many alternatives to wood fires introduced by the technological age, a lot of people still prefer a fire.

In Perth, one third of all households rely on wood as their main source of heating. Wood fires are cheap to run but require a great deal of work. Wood must be found, collected, carted, cut, sorted and

carried to the fireplace, not to mention the extra cleaning work involved and time taken to bury the ashes.

Still, many people consider the primitive warmth of a wood fire well worth the effort.

However, Perth's growing population is straining the ability of our forests to satisfy the demand for firewood without jeopardising their survival and beauty.

Scavenging for firewood has taken its toll, and if wood collecting is to be managed properly, there must be adequate controls and checks.

The Northern Forest Region of CALM, which manages the forests around Perth, has historically borne

the brunt of the city's demand for firewood.

Indiscriminate scrounging over the years has meant that supplies of "collect-your-own" firewood near Perth are very low, especially in suburbs like Mundaring and Kalamunda, where woodburning is popular.

Firewood can only be collected in State Forest or timber reserves managed by CALM. Wood collecting is prohibited in all National Parks and other conservation reserves, as dead and living wood provides valuable habitat for native fauna. In Disease Risk Areas in State Forest, firewood may only be collected from officially-designated areas in summer, and a licence is required.

# O O D



Contractors selling firewood get their supplies from CALM through a Minor Forest Produce Licence and, more recently, contract of sale. Their stocks come from by-products from operations like thinning which are essential to good timber production.

Each year contractors around Perth buy about 29,000 tonnes of firewood. But when dry wood retails for \$60-80 a tonne, many people are keen to collect their own, especially when that entails an enjoyable day in the bush, and perhaps a picnic lunch. However, indiscriminate firewood collection can cause serious forest management problems.

Most of us start thinking about firewood with the onset of the first cold winter nights. This is usually after rain has fallen, when the damaging fungal disease, jarrah dieback, is most active. Firewood collectors spread dieback when they drive off sealed roads and push into the bush carrying the fungus in moist soil caught on their tyres. The popularity of off-road vehicles has increased the dieback risk, and when they plough through the bush they also damage vegetation and cause erosion.

When firewood is scarce, chainsaws are taken to living trees. This is not only illegal and damaging to the forest, but extremely dangerous to untrained chainsaw handlers. Tree felling is one of the deadliest trades. One person has recently been killed while illegally felling trees in the forest near Perth.

To better manage firewood collection, CALM directs people to designated firewood areas. This concentrates activity to specific sites. A limit of a 6' x 4' trailer load (half-a-tonne) has been set to discourage unscrupulous commercial operators. Last year, the region prosecuted three people for illegally taking firewood.

In designated areas, firewood usually comes from the trimmings produced by forest operations. Sites are relocated when firewood levels dwindle or other management problems occur. A pamphlet, available from all Northern Forest Region offices, is produced each winter to guide firewood collectors.

Dieback is not active in dry soil conditions and CALM has started a campaign to encourage the public to 'squirrel', or collect from CALM firewood areas in summer and autumn.

Although firewood is probably the last thing on people's minds during the heat of summer, collecting wood at this time has many advantages. The weather is drier and, with less collectors around, there is a better choice of wood.

At this time of the year, firewood areas can also be designated within Disease Risk Areas, because the dieback fungus is inactive and unlikely to be spread during dry summer weather.

Near Perth there are 10 designated areas, ranging from Yanchep to Waroona, for summer and autumn firewood collection. Licences are needed for only three of these areas; the rest are free. A small licence fee of \$5.00 per load is charged to recoup the cost of supervision and forest management.

With readily-available firewood supplies dwindling, it is also hoped that people clearing land for mining, road construction, farming and housing development will become more active selling wood to the public.

Wood heaters will be with us for some time yet, and wood from land clearing needs to be seen as a resource, not a troublesome waste product to be removed by site-burning.



John Green

*Squirrelling for firewood in State Forest can be a great day out for the whole family.*



# LANDSCOPE

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## EDITORIAL

A prerequisite for the successful management of land and wildlife is an understanding of the processes that drive ecosystems, and managers who can manipulate these processes.

In Western Australia, we are fortunate that we have a wealth of talent in different government agencies, tertiary institutions and private companies who can provide these research and management skills.

Of course, obtaining a perfect understanding of ecosystems and ways to manage them brings to mind the frog who wants to reach a creek, but can only jump half the distance every time.

But it is not the complexities of understanding or managing ecosystems which provide the greatest difficulty.

Social and political factors are far more difficult to accommodate.

All the scientific and managerial skills in the world are worth nothing if the community and, often more importantly, selected constituencies within the community do not support the management strategies.

Unfortunately, there is often an inverse relationship between a scientist's or manager's skills in his profession and his capacity to handle social and political factors in the community. This is not surprising, since most scientists and managers have received little training in basic communication skills, let alone community politics.

CALM is attempting to address this problem in a variety of ways. But the people who should know the most about how to obtain community support for public land management strategies are the public. *Landscape* readers are an important and influential constituency. If you have thoughts on this issue we would like to hear from you.



*What a sterling idea! A new management plan for CALM's South Coast Region - page 28.*



*Are insects gradually eating away our jarrah forests? Turn to page 18.*



*What lies beneath the waters of Marmion Marine Park? See page 25.*

## COVER



*A rose by any other name... Does its name detract from the beauty of the common eggfly (Hypolimnastolus bolina)? Photograph - Jiri Lochman*

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