

Lake Leschenaultia Park - Pre-emptive closure of the park on Extreme and Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating days

File Code	EM.VNT 1
Author	Adrian Dyson, Manager Community Safety & Emergency Management
Senior Employee	Mark Luzi, Director Statutory Services
Disclosure of Any Interest	Nil
Attachments	Nil

PURPOSE

This report recommends that Council endorse a Shire of Mundaring operational practice to undertake pre-emptive closures of the Lake Leschenaultia Park on Extreme and Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating days as follows:

Extreme: The lake park is closed to the general public however open to campers

Catastrophic: The lake park is closed to the general public and campers

BACKGROUND

Lake Leschenaultia Park while being an outdoor area of significant natural beauty offering both passive and active (swimming, kayaking/canoeing, walking, mountain biking) recreation opportunities poses a number of bushfire safety related risks basically outlined as follows:

- The lake park and surrounding reserves are extensively wooded, extreme bush fire risk areas.
- One main access/egress point onto/off a road (Rosedale Rd) with that road not being a “through road”, that is only providing for escape out of bushfire risk areas in one direction. These factors bring about a risk to Lake Park patrons, Shire lake park staff and firefighters if the lake park is threatened by a bushfire requiring evacuation of the Lake Park patrons and staff.

Prior to the implementation of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System on 1 September 2022 and since the 2021/2022 bushfire high threat period a pre-emptive closure regime was implemented as follows:

- Severe FDR: Lake park closed to the general public (booked camping allowed)
- Extreme and Catastrophic FDR: Lake park closed to all patrons (general public and campers)

With the introduction of the AFDRS on 1 September 2022 and thus for the 2022/2023 bushfire high threat period the pre-emptive closure regime introduced to align with the new ratings was:

- Extreme FDR: Lake park closed to general public (booked camping allowed)
- Catastrophic FDR: lake park closed to all patrons (general public and campers)

Noting that the AFDRS is a new fire danger rating system on ground local observations were in many instances that the FDR was significantly higher than would be expected given the on ground local conditions. In short the AFDRS rating was seen as overstating the actual risk.

Following application of the AFDRS informed pre-emptive closure regime the lake park was thus closed on an increased number of days wherein a significant number of complaints were received that the conditions were nothing other than a warm summer day and could not be considered of significant bushfire risk.

In review of the above matters a decision was made to align the pre-emptive closure regime with the regime adopted by Department of Biodiversity , Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) in that closure would occur when either John Forrest National Park, Walyunga National Park or Greenmount National Park were closed due to bushfire risk conditions.

Subsequent to the national review of the AFDRS wherein Shire staff were advised that adjustments had been made to the system such that it (the system) could be better expected to match the forecast rating.

The pre-emptive closure regime thus adopted for the 2023/2024 bushfire high threat period reverted to:

- Extreme FDR: Lake park closed to general public (booked camping allowed)
- Catastrophic FDR: lake park closed to all patrons (general public and campers)

STATUTORY / LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Work Health and Safety Act 2020

Emergency Management Act 2005

Bush Fires Act 1954

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

NIL

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Potential loss of Lake Leschenaultia Park entry and camping fees revenue

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Mundaring Strategic Community Plan 2020 - 2030

Priority 1 - Community

Objective 1.1 – Healthy, safe, sustainable and resilient community

Strategy 1.1.7 – Provide emergency management planning, disaster management and disaster recovery, and associated community liaison and education

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Nil

RISK IMPLICATIONS

Risk: People, Compliance and Reputational in the event that as a result of a bushfire incident affecting the lake park injuries/deaths occur (to patrons, staff or emergency responders) wholly or partly due to difficulties evacuating the lake park		
Likelihood	Consequence	Rating
Possible	Extreme	High
Action / Strategy		
Continue to apply a bushfire risk pre-emptive closure at the Lake Leschenaultia Park		

Risk: Reputational and Financial risk associated with patrons being unable to access the lake park on days of pre-emptive closure		
Likelihood	Consequence	Rating
Possible	Minor	Moderate
Action / Strategy		
Continue to engage with the community as to the risk management profile of the lake and associated reasons for exercising pre-emptive closures		

EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

This report represents formal consultation with Shire of Mundaring Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades

This matter has been the subject of consultation with the Shire's insurer, Local Government Insurance Services Western Australia

COMMENT

Shire of Mundaring is both legislatively and in terms of common law as the entity responsible for management of risks associated with the reserve operated as Lake Leschenaultia Park noting that it (the Shire) has developed and promotes that reserve as a recreational and tourist facility.

Shire of Mundaring is therefore prudent in, upon assessment of any/all risks inherent in managing the public place being Lake Leschenaultia Park, putting in place risk control measures to best protect patrons, staff and emergency responders attending that facility from harm associated with a bushfire impacting, or likely to impact the lake park.

The adoption of a Pre-Emptive Closure regime is thus reasonable and warranted.

VOTING REQUIREMENT

Simple Majority

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

Endorses a Shire of Mundaring operational practice to undertake pre-emptive closures of the Lake Leschenaultia Park on Extreme and Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating days as follows:

Extreme: The lake park is closed to the general public however open to campers

Catastrophic: The lake park is closed to the general public and campers