



ACT Government

2003-2004 BUDGET

REGENERATING OUR ENVIRONMENT AFTER THE FIRES

Restoring and regenerating the ACT's natural environment after the bushfires is a high priority for the ACT Government, Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, said today.

Budget 2003-04 includes a number of initiatives aimed at restoring the Territory's natural and cultural assets damaged or destroyed in the January 2003 bushfires.

"The January 2003 bushfires severely damaged or destroyed many bushland recreational areas that are dear to our community.

"Restoring these natural assets is a very high priority for my Government. In some cases, we are aiming not simply to return to our pre-bushfire status but rather taking the opportunity to preserve what we love best about our city, and to build on and improve those things that it is timely or appropriate to change.

"In this budget we have put aside funding to plan for the strategic and holistic redevelopment of our natural and recreational areas and facilities to once again allow the people of Canberra and visitors to the ACT can continue to enjoy bushwalks, picnics, sightseeing and other leisure activities.

"We have provided \$130,00 for the development of a five-year Post-Bushfire Recreational Strategy for the natural areas of the ACT to guide the redevelopment of recreational facilities and visitor opportunities.

"Whilst some have recently re-opened, many of our recreation sites remain closed to ensure public safety or because facilities have been destroyed.

"The level of damage means we have to ensure that reconstruction is implemented in a way that creates better facilities and experiences for the community whilst ensuring natural systems are conserved and given time to recover.

"The Recreational Strategy will involve the development of concept, master and individual and site plans. It will be developed in consultation with the community and stakeholders," said Mr Stanhope.

The Chief Minister said the budget also funded other restoration work for the environment.

"We have also allocated \$2 million over three years for restoring walking trails and repairing land in our nature parks and reserves that was damaged when 250 kilometres of fire suppression trails were cut through previously undisturbed landscape as part of the January 2003 fire-fighting efforts.

"We have also set aside an additional \$200,000 for the recovery of our valuable historic and

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indigenous places affected by the fires. We have already allocated \$100,000 towards this essential work in the aftermath of the fires and the additional funding will allow for the continued review of, and conservation works on, heritage places affected by the fires.

“The funding will facilitate the compilation of location and condition reports to help prevent further damage and will guide the statutory revision to the Territory Plan, assessing the status of places on the ACT Heritage Places Register.

“Other environmental initiatives funded in the 2003-04 budget for bushfire recovery include:

- \$850,000 over three years for weed suppression in areas including Canberra Nature Park, Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (see separate release);
- \$600,000 to improve the control of vegetation and weeds on rural road verges over four years;
- \$250,000 over four years for obtaining data and managing information to ensure effective planning for recovery of natural, cultural and built assets; and
- \$80,000 to increase planning resources for bushfire fuel management.

“My Government values the community’s contribution in the bushfire recovery process. The scale of the bushfires has brought home the imperative to pursue goals that are environmentally sustainable and strengthened our resolve to continue to work with the community for enhanced and sustainable environmental outcomes.

“We are providing \$300,000 in this budget over two years to enable us to work with existing networks of catchment groups and community service organisations in research and monitoring, planning and implementing conservation, restoration and construction works along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and Catchment.

Statement ends.