



2018 NATIONAL LANDCARE AWARDS

11 October
Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre

Nominee: Bunya People's Aboriginal Corporation and Burnett Mary Regional Group, QLD
Category: Rio Tinto Indigenous Land Management Award

The Bunya Mountains – some 70km north of Toowoomba in Queensland – had historically been the site of Aboriginal gatherings, which unfortunately declined in the 1870s. This led to a decline in the extent and health of the grassland balds and the open eucalypt forests with grassy understoreys. For this reason, fire management in the Bunya Mountains has become a highly significant issue for both cultural and ecological reasons.

To address this, the Bunya Mountains Murri Rangers (BMMR) have been restoring the grassland habitats through a combination of contemporary management methods and traditional fire management methods. The damage to the grassland habitats has been significant following the time when Aboriginal people were managing country, so the manual removal of woody weeds has been an essential step before being able to implement on-going management through traditional fire practices.

As a result, BMMR have successfully cleared key grassland balds throughout Russell Park, and are now reviving fire management based on ecological indicators at the habitat scale – a process of 'Reading Country'. Using methods taught by leading cultural fire practitioner Victor Steffensen from Mulong, the Rangers are now implementing a cultural burning regime for the first time for nearly 150 years. This has led to a research partnership being explored with the Queensland University of Technology to develop a study of the floristic diversity changes with the implementation of these burning practices.

Aboriginal people traditionally used intensive and strategic fire management practices in the Bunya Mountains and surrounds to facilitate access to and from the Bunya gatherings, and to create ideal habitat mosaics for hunting. The absence of active Aboriginal fire management practice has resulted in the recession of Indigenous ecological knowledge of fire management in the Bunya Mountains. For this reason, the BMMR have been working closely with, not only Victor Steffensen, but from Olliver Costello from Firesticks, who are among those leading the resurgence of Aboriginal cultural fire management in Australia.

The BMMR goal is to utilise traditional fire management practices to maintain the health of Country. As mentioned, the long absence of this practice has led to multiple issues with the health of the Country. Contemporary management practices have therefore also been used to remove contemporary threats so that Cultural Burning can be effectively reinstated.

The aspiration to revive Aboriginal management of the Bunya Mountains was put forward by Traditional Owner representatives and Elders from over 15 tribes during the development of the Bunya Mountains Aboriginal Aspirations and Caring for Country Plan from 2010. To have a team of six Aboriginal people employed to undertake this critical work has created a positive impact within the Aboriginal community, and is the realisation of a key Aboriginal community aspiration.

This program is supported by Landcare Australia and the National Landcare Network, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program.





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The Rangers are not only important mentors for young Aboriginal people, but also have built long lasting partnerships with stakeholders involved with the Bunya Mountains, building trust and re-establishing the Aboriginal 'footprint' in the Bunya Mountains. The presence and action of BMMR has led to a deeper understanding of Aboriginal history and values of the Bunya Mountains for the local community and the multitude of visitors that come through the Bunya Mountains.

This important revival of burning practices has been brought about by powerful collaborations and partnerships with a range of organisations and groups, including Traditional Custodians, Aboriginal organisations and community, land management agencies and Universities. BMMR are sharing the cultural burning revival with Aboriginal groups across the South-East Queensland and Northern NSW, hosting the Bonye Bonye Fire workshop in June 2017.

Landcare is a grassroots movement that harnesses individuals and groups to protect, restore and sustainably manage Australia's natural environment and its productivity. Groups that fall under the Landcare umbrella work on a diverse range of environmental projects and include farmers embracing sustainable farm management and any community group that partakes in volunteer environmental activities. To find out how you can become a Landcare volunteer and for full details on all 2016 National Landcare finalists, visit www.landcareaustralia.org.au

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Web Summary

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