

→ Fuels and fire in the high country

The 2003 alpine fires were the catalyst for the multidisciplinary HighFire study

▶ HighFire is a Bushfire CRC project funded by the Australian Government in the aftermath of the 2003 alpine fires that swept across Victoria, New South Wales and the ACT. HighFire is now conducting high quality research on issues relating to fuels and fire management in the high country.

The outcomes of HighFire research will provide an improved evidence-base from which land and fire managers can further refine the policies and practices used to mitigate the effects of wildfire events on people, property and ecosystem values.

HighFire is multidisciplinary, with three major themes:

1. **High Country Fuels and Ecosystem Functions** has established research sites in New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT to examine how fuel management practices (prescribed fire, browsing and grazing) and wildfire interact with a range of complex ecosystem functions including: rates of plant growth (fuel accumulation); landscape flammability; gas emissions from plant growth, plant combustion and from soils; climate change and water quality and quantity.
2. **Living with Fire in Australia's High Country** is working with communities to better understand what makes them resilient to living in fire-prone areas.
3. **Managing Bushfire Risk in High Country Landscapes** is developing a bushfire risk model for high country landscapes.



▲ ABOVE: LOCAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS MET WITH HIGHFIRE RESEARCHERS ON THE SNOWY PLAINS RESEARCH SITES IN NSW IN MARCH THIS YEAR.



▶ LEFT: A HIGHFIRE CARBON AND WATER FLUX TOWER ON THE BOGONG HIGH PLAINS IN NORTH EAST VICTORIA.

OUTCOMES

Stakeholder engagements are a critical component of HighFire. They underpin the project on human resilience and, more broadly, are a condition of success for the other studies.

HighFire continues to engage widely with stakeholders in Australia and internationally. The following list is a snapshot of the breadth of HighFire's ongoing engagements.

- A High Country Fuels and Ecosystems Functions Open Day at a Snowy Plains research site attended by 80 local residents.
- Support from the Australian Alpine Liaison Committee following a presentation to the Committee that includes the support of senior representatives of the federal Department of Environment and Heritage, Parks Victoria, NSW Department of Environment and Conservation and Environment ACT.
- Key-note presentation at the NSW-Rural Fire Service southern region conference 2006.
- Key-note presentation at the ACT National Parks Association Symposium 2006.
- Establishment of International collaboration with the Valles Caldera Preserve in New Mexico, USA; Ludwigs University, Freiburg, Germany; and the Institute for Atmospheric Research, Garmisch, Germany.
- Collaboration with the water authority ACTew and Ecowise, which includes financial support.
- Ongoing alpine-community focus groups undertaken by researchers studying human resilience.
- Support of Bushfire CRC partners and stakeholders including: Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria, NSW Rural Fire Service, ACT Rural Fire Service, Environment ACT, Snowy Hydro and ACT National Parks Association.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

HighFire is Bushfire CRC Project B6. Dr Maria Taranto is the project manager. The project leaders are Professor Mark Adams of the University of New South Wales, Professor John Handmer of RMIT University, Rick McRae of the Emergency Services Authority ACT, and Professor Rodney Weber of the University of New South Wales, Australian Defence Force Academy.