

CHOPPERS THE ANSWER FOR TANAMI TRADITIONAL OWNERS

For the first time, traditional owners have used aerial burning technology to keep country healthy in two of Australia's most remote areas.

Earlier this year, senior traditional land owners in the southern and central Tanami trialled the 'Raindance' machine, which allows them to drop small incendiary devices from a low flying helicopter this year.

In the trials, the traditional owners directed burning on their family lands near Lake Mackay and Lake Surprise and burnt a total of around 50,000 hectares of country in hundreds of patch burns under mild conditions. It is hoped to expand these trials next year.

People were very pleased with the results of their burning work.

They were able to first visit sites on their country and then burn lots of small fires exactly where they wanted.

It is the only way that traditional owners of very remote, inaccessible lands can do enough burning to keep their country healthy.

The CLC sourced funding for the \$20,000 machine from the federal

Caring for Our Country and Natural Disaster Mitigation programs.

Aboriginal Rangers and CLC Land Management staff were trained in operating the machine in Alice Springs before the trials started.

The CLC hopes to be able to support interested traditional owners in other remote areas to trial the aerial burning technology on their country in the future.

HOW IT WORKS...

The aerial burning device is mounted in a helicopter and at the press of a button, two chemicals are mixed together in a small plastic capsule, which drops down a chute and on to the ground.

After less than a minute, the chemicals react and ignite.

A computer records exactly where each one of these incendiaries is dropped.

Thousands of incendiaries have been used in a single day, to light lots of small fires across the vast Tanami lands, which will help protect their country from the devastation of massive summer wildfires



(Above) Smoke drifts across the Tanami Desert during burn offs lit from the air. (Below) Traditional owners Mickey Singleton addresses rangers during planning for burn offs in the Tanami.



New Warlu Committee for the Tanami

Fire management in the vast Tanami Desert will get a significant boost from a new committee made up of Aboriginal fire practitioners from the area.

The Warlu (meaning 'fire' in Warlpiri) Committee is made up of two community members and a senior ranger from Daguragu, Lajamanu, Tennant Creek, Alekerange, Willowra, Yuendumu and Nyirripi.

These members were chosen based on their knowledge of country, culture and fire and their willingness to speak up strong about fire management on Aboriginal Land.

Importantly, there is a broad mix of old people, young people, ladies and men on the committee.

Fire management has become critical in the Tanami where large, uncontrolled wildfires spread across vast tracts of inaccessible spinifex country every few years.

Between 1999 and 2002 there were good rainfalls in the Tanami and fuel loads became extremely high in some areas.

Fires frequently burnt out of control and in 2002 smoke could be seen for several weeks west of Alice Springs from several very large fires in the region.

In 2007, after two good rainfall seasons, almost half of the Tanami was again consumed by fire.

In such a big landscape, fire management needs to be considered at a strategic level to be effective.

The Warlu Committee will begin to tackle big-picture fire issues across the Tanami and provide strategic direction to the CLC's fire program.

The committee decided on its rules and structure and the types of issues it would talk about at a meeting held by the CLC in September.

It's been a busy time for Aboriginal fire management in the

Tanami, so the Warlu Committee had a lot to discuss.

Some regional issues talked about were: aerial burning; the committees' boundary and representation; firebreaks and protection of outstations; and how the old and new fire laws work.

Senior rangers from Lajamanu, Tennant Creek and Yuendumu proudly talked about fire work their ranger groups did in 2009.

The committee met with scientists from CSIRO to talk about the greenhouse effect and fire management.

They also visited Bushfires NT to hear about the Bushfires Council and how Bushfires NT can help the committee and ranger groups.

Funding for the committee was provided through the Natural Resource Management Board (NT) and the Central Land Council.



The newly-created Warlu Committee (above) that will look at "big picture" fire issues and a CSIRO presentation on the greenhouse effect of fires.

