

# year in brief

State-wide projects

Region North activity

Region South activity

Region East activity

Region West activity

## Roadside Vegetation Program

*The Roadside Vegetation Program (RVP) was a State-wide initiative coordinated by the Regional Services Directorate and implemented through the Regions and Districts in liaison with local councils.*

Part of the Roadside Vegetation program, this roadside burn was on the Barrier Highway, about 170km west of Cobar. Photo by Robyn Favelle

The focus of the RVP was on clearing strategic roads leading into and around isolated villages. The burning, mechanical clearing and spraying along major strategic roads built Asset Protection Zones and Strategic Fire Advantage Zones around the village, protecting them from bush or grass fire.

Areas where roadsides had dried out and were left with a large bulk of dry matter were identified by the local councils and NSW RFS Districts as the focus of the RVP.

Across NSW, 36 councils were involved and nearly 10,000 hectares and 6,429.25 kilometres of roadside were treated in the reporting period. More than half of this work was done in Region West, with Region South also

quite busy. The burning, mechanical clearing and spraying along major strategic roads was completed with the assistance of the State Mitigation Support Services as well as out-of-area volunteers.

The majority of the planned works were completed in the reporting period, which was remarkable given the wet weather conditions that were experienced throughout the year.

The RVP was one of a number of additional measures taken by the Service to prepare for the 2012/13 bush fire danger period and was made possible by an extra allocation from the Rural Fire Fighting Fund for this purpose.



# year in brief

## Regional Forums



Volunteers meeting with Assistant Commissioner Dominic Lane at the Dubbo Regional Forum. Photo courtesy of The Daily Liberal

*Consulting with volunteers in face-to-face meetings was a focus for Regional Services Directorate in 2011/12.*

The Regional Forums was a project initiated by Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons where members of the Executive travelled around NSW to meet with volunteers. The aim of the project is to ensure that volunteers were well informed about current updates and changes in the NSW RFS.

Between March and July 2012, Assistant Commissioner Dominic Lane travelled the State attending 32 Regional Forums from Glen Innes to Coonabarabran to Bourke and south to Deniliquin.

More than 1,000 volunteers were part of the consultation in the reporting period and the project is continuing into the next year.

The topics covered in the Regional Forums included the upcoming bush fire season, NSW RFS budget and finances, hazard reduction, State Mitigation Support Services, Deductible Gift Recipient status, the Brigade Constitution Review, Harmonisation of WHS Legislation, District and Regional Realignment, Radio Enhancement, Red Fleet Policy, MyRFS/SAP – Volunteer Management, the Rank Review, District Support Brigade Review and Flexible Membership. There was also time for general discussion.

Assistant Commissioner Dominic Lane was enthusiastic about the Forums.

“The Regional Forums provide an ideal opportunity for volunteers to hear directly from the NSW RFS Executive

on the important issues,” he said. “They are also the opportunity for volunteers to give feedback, raise questions and provide input into key operational issues.”

“Every area in the State has different areas of focus depending on local weather conditions, topography, and the sort of fire emergencies they attend most,” he said, “So each of the Regional Forums was also unique to the needs of the volunteers in that area.”

The topic most commonly raised among volunteers was the upcoming 2012/13 fire season and the threat of grass fires.

“Our volunteers are our most important resource,” he said, “consultation with them in a face-to-face environment has proved to be very valuable for the Executive and, I believe, for the volunteers.”

## Protocol Officers and Pipes and Drums Band

*The Protocol Team forms part of the public face of the NSW RFS and along with the Pipes and Drums Band, contributes to the standing and reputation of the NSW RFS.*

A new State Protocol Officer, two new Deputy State Protocol Officers and 15 new members of the Protocol Team have been appointed in the reporting period. Protocol Team tasks include assisting Regional and District staff with Service recognition medal ceremonies, facilities openings, tanker handovers, civic functions as well as coming together for major NSW RFS commitments such as the State Championships, Volunteers Memorial Service and the annual St Florian's Day ceremony at NSW RFS Headquarters

in Lidcombe. Dressed in formal uniform tunics, they add an extra level of respect and dignity at Service funerals and commemorative functions.

State Protocol Officer (SPO), Bill Duncan is the newly appointed head of the team along with two new deputies, Deputy State Protocol Officers (DSPO) Mark Unwin and Chris Palmer. Due to their fresh recruiting and training efforts in the reporting period, 15 new members have joined the State Protocol team bringing the State-wide total to 27. Of the three key positions who have been appointed in the reporting period, the SPO and the two DSPOs, two of these are volunteers and one is a staff member.

"It is important that our Service extends its high performing and long-serving members sincere and honourable recognition for their achievements and generous contribution to the safety and welfare of their fellow citizens," Bill Duncan said, "Our Protocol team can help do that."

Since the inception of the State Protocol Officer role in 1994, the NSW RFS has

had three Protocol Officers, Chief Supt Brian Pickford, Supt Bruce Tory and Supt Richard Petch. Each has contributed to the standing and reputation of the NSW RFS in their own way. The SPO is an honorary position and office holders are appointed for a period of three years.

The SPO is the NSW RFS representative on the State Protocol Committee and is required to work with other agencies in coordinating and harmonising protocols between agencies. The position works very closely with the chaplains of the NSW RFS, particularly the Senior Chaplains and liaises with the Coordinator Counselling and Support Unit regularly.

"I am very keen to include more members from regional NSW in the team," said Bill Duncan, "throughout 2011/12 I have travelled around NSW to meet interested volunteers and provide training."

In the reporting period Regional squads have been formed in Regentville, Queanbeyan, Orange and the Clarence Valley.

Protocol team in action at the Valley Heights Brigade opening in March 2012



# year in brief

## Rapid Aerial Response and Remote Area Firefighting Teams

*The Service's capacity to respond immediately to bush fires in remote areas was dramatically increased in the reporting period*

2011/12 achievements include the first Rapid Aerial Response Team (RART) deployment, training of nearly 200 volunteers and the formation of the of the Remote Area Fire Firefighting and Specialised Operations Section (RAFSO Section).

The first successful RART deployment took place on 20 September 2011. A RART team composed of RAFT volunteers from Blue Mountains and the Hawkesbury was deployed to the Colo area of the Hawkesbury District. The teams located and contained a

fire north of Wheelbarrow Ridge Road, Green Swamp. Using dry firefighting techniques they quickly contained the perimeter of the fire, while overhead the helicopter undertook bucketing operations. The crew was extracted from the site by helicopter once the fire was contained. Hawkesbury District deployed local crews the next day to continue working on hot spots of the fire.

Throughout the fire season two dedicated medium winch capable helicopters were on standby and apart from this deployment in the Hawkesbury, they were also redeployed to assist in flood operations when needed from November to March 2012.

The newly formed RAFSO Section coordinated training in Remote Firefighting for 52 volunteers giving NSW RFS a capability of 148 trained Remote Area Firefighters. This total includes 134 Helicopter Winch Certified Remote Area Firefighters. A further 33

Remote Area Firefighters undertook Helicopter Winch Skills training and 101 volunteers were recertified in Helicopter Winch Skills training.

To better assist, support and recognise the contribution of RAFT firefighters the Section formed the Remote Area Firefighting Teams Focus Group. The group is tasked with enhancing the capability, understanding and utilisation of Remote Area Firefighting Teams throughout NSW.

A Joint Operational Protocol for Remote Area Firefighting has been developed between the NSW RFS and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The protocol was endorsed by both organisations in the reporting period, and consolidates the operating guidelines for remote fires in NSW.

The reporting period has seen an increase in the use, interest and training levels of this scarce specialist resource.

Group Captain Craig Burley assessing RAFT and RART crews in the Helicopter Winching Skills course in Camden August 2011. Photo by Chris Ryder





Photo by Rebel Talbert

## Base Camps

*In the reporting period four simultaneous Base Camps were established in flood-affected south western NSW along with two Base Camps in support of NSW Police operations on the Mid North Coast.*

In a first for the NSW RFS, a Base Camp was established for an external agency. On 10 December 2011 the NSW Police Force requested accommodation for up to 120 specialist police on the Mid North coast of NSW, as part of an operation to apprehend a criminal. The Base Camp was established by Operational and Mitigation Support Services (OMSS) within 24 hours and NSW RFS volunteers provided catering until the close of the incident on 30 January 2012. A Base Camp which functioned as a commander's room and briefing room for the same operation was established at Gloucester Fire Control Centre from 23 December until 25 March 2012.

In early March the first request for a Base Camp in response to the floods in the south west of NSW was received. The State Emergency Operations Centre requested a joint emergency services Base Camp for the township of Barellan on 9 March, 2012. The Base Camp was established within 24 hours with the capacity to accommodate 130 emergency services personnel. It operated from 9-21 March.

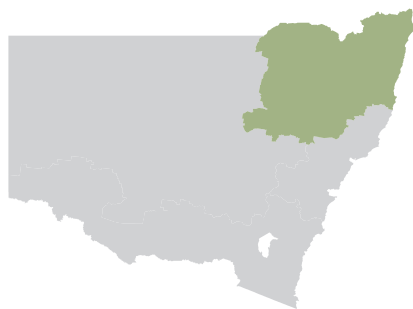
The second Base Camp was another first for the NSW RFS. A civilian Base Camp or Temporary Accommodation Centre (TAC) which was established

on 13 March at the Sports Oval in Coleambally. The centre was established for 100 evacuees from the Murrumbidgee River township of Darlington Point, who had been isolated on the southern side of the river from Griffith. The centre operated until 19 March when river levels had receded enough to allow residents to return home.

The next day, on 14 March the State Emergency Operations Centre requested a TAC at Deniliquin to house up to 500 evacuees from the township of Hay as a result flooding in the Murrumbidgee River. A TAC at the Deniliquin Showground was operational within 24 hours of the request. This was also the first time in NSW that the Major Evacuation Centre Policy had been utilised under the direction of the State Emergency Operations Controller which operated for 13 days and was the largest temporary accommodation centre established in NSW history.

On 15 March the final request for a Base Camp was received for a joint emergency services Base Camp at Hay. The Base Camp at the Hay Showground accommodated 100 emergency service personnel, was operational within 48 hours and operated until 26 March 2012.

# region north



## Key Facts

Volunteers	13,850
	Male 10,945
	Female 2,905
Incidents in 2011/12	3,634
Vehicles	1,975
NSW RFS Districts	11
NSW RFS Brigades	526
Square kilometres	152,495
Population	634,314
Landscape types	
<i>Coastal scrub, forested hills and flat cropping and grazing in the west</i>	

## Season Overview

Region North experienced limited fire activity during the 2011/12 fire season both in terms of local and out-of-area operations. The Region did make a significant contribution and commitment of resources to assist NSW SES through the major flood events that affected northern and north western NSW late in 2011 and early 2012. Volunteers, Incident Management personnel, Strike Teams and Aviation Support personnel were deployed to the various locations affected by the flood emergencies. The township of Moree and its surrounding villages were devastated in November and again in February as floodwaters inundated the area and isolated thousands of residents. NSW RFS crews worked tirelessly to assist NSW SES crews and the affected residents.

During late December 2011 to mid January 2012, Region North volunteers and staff were deployed to provide logistical support to a Police Search Operation that centred around the New England Village of Nowendoc. Operational and Mitigation Support Services established the base camps and members from New England and Tamworth provided catering and base camp accommodation support. The operation was one of the largest search operations ever conducted in NSW. As the operation continued crews from across Region North and Region East supplemented the NSW RFS deployments.

## Significant hazard reductions

A continued strong focus through all levels of the organisation on fire mitigation and hazard reduction has seen the Region achieve significant hazard reduction outcomes for the third consecutive year. This effort was

supported by work from the State Mitigation Support Services (SMSS), and across the Region the number of hazard reduction jobs completed was more than double the achievements of 2010/11.

A full report of hazard reductions, development applications, hazard reduction certificates and hazard reduction complaints appears in Appendix A.

► *Details appear in the Appendices.*

Across the Region over 17,400km of fire trails have now been registered and classified. The Bush Fire Risk Management Planning program has continued to progress with all draft plans finally approved during the course of 2011/12. The Bush Fire Risk Management Plans set future mitigation, hazard reduction and community engagement priorities across the Region and will be major contributors to reducing bush fire risk to communities over the next five years.

## Regional Training

The Annual Region North Exercise held at Glen Innes continued to be very successful and productive delivering scenario based activities to enhance the skills and capabilities of the Region's volunteers and staff. A number of scenario's drew on the expertise of external agencies, which included counter terrorism, electrical safety, leadership, LPG safety, first aid and search for missing persons.

Four hundred and twenty eight volunteers with 52 Appliances took part in the 12 training scenarios that were designed to teach and refresh crew members and crew leaders in all aspects of dealing with fire related incidents.



A Senior Volunteer Forum was held in Armidale in August 2011 with 62 attendees.

To enhance the skills of local staff in preparing Bush Fire Hazard Reduction Certificates, processing Hazard Complaints and undertaking Development Assessment, the Region hosted introductory and advanced field assessment workshops.

The annual Incident Management Workshop was conducted in July 2011 at Coffs Harbour Fire Control Centre with inter-agency participation from FRNSW, NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service and Forestry NSW. The exercise ensures the continued provision of high standard coordinated operational capability during major fire and multi-agency incidents involving NSW fire and land management agencies and interstate counterparts.

## Community engagement

The 2011/12 Regional Community Engagement Forum was held in Tamworth. Attended by volunteers and staff, the forum provided highly interactive sessions dealing with many topics including targeting engagement efforts to our most vulnerable communities, practical sessions on one to one interaction, and promotion strategies for the recently introduced banner phrase 'Prepare. Act. Survive'.

Major field day exhibits at Casino's Primex and Gunnedah's AgQuip rural expos were well attended with once again NSW RFS maintaining the opportunity to be an exhibitor. These major rural expos continue to provide volunteer and staff community engagement facilitators the opportunity to interact directly with thousands of members of the rural sector community.

## Our members

Region North Volunteer and Staff dedication was duly recognised through a number of medal and award ceremonies held in Districts across the region throughout the year. A total of 532 awards, totalling thousands of year's service to the community of NSW, were presented to members.

Awards presented to Region North members included NSW RFS Commissioner's Commendations, NSW RFS Long Service Medals, National Medals and the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM). The most notable awards presented in Region North included the Commissioner's Award for Valour, presented to Tamworth District volunteer Kendall Thompson for his role in a number of life saving rescues during the Queensland floods in early 2011. See more details on the next page.

► *Details appear in the Year in Brief.*

The AFSM was awarded to Group Captain Geoffrey (Boots) Towner for his many years of dedicated service to the Clarence Valley communities and to Superintendent Michael Brooks for his many years of dedicated service to the Namoi Gwydir area.

## Building capacity in the region

The Northern Rivers Fire Control Centre project that commenced in 2010/11 was completed during 2011/12. The \$3.7 million Fire Control Centre now houses the Northern Rivers Zone consolidating the Richmond Valley, Lismore and Kyogle Districts.

► *Details appear in the Year in Brief.*

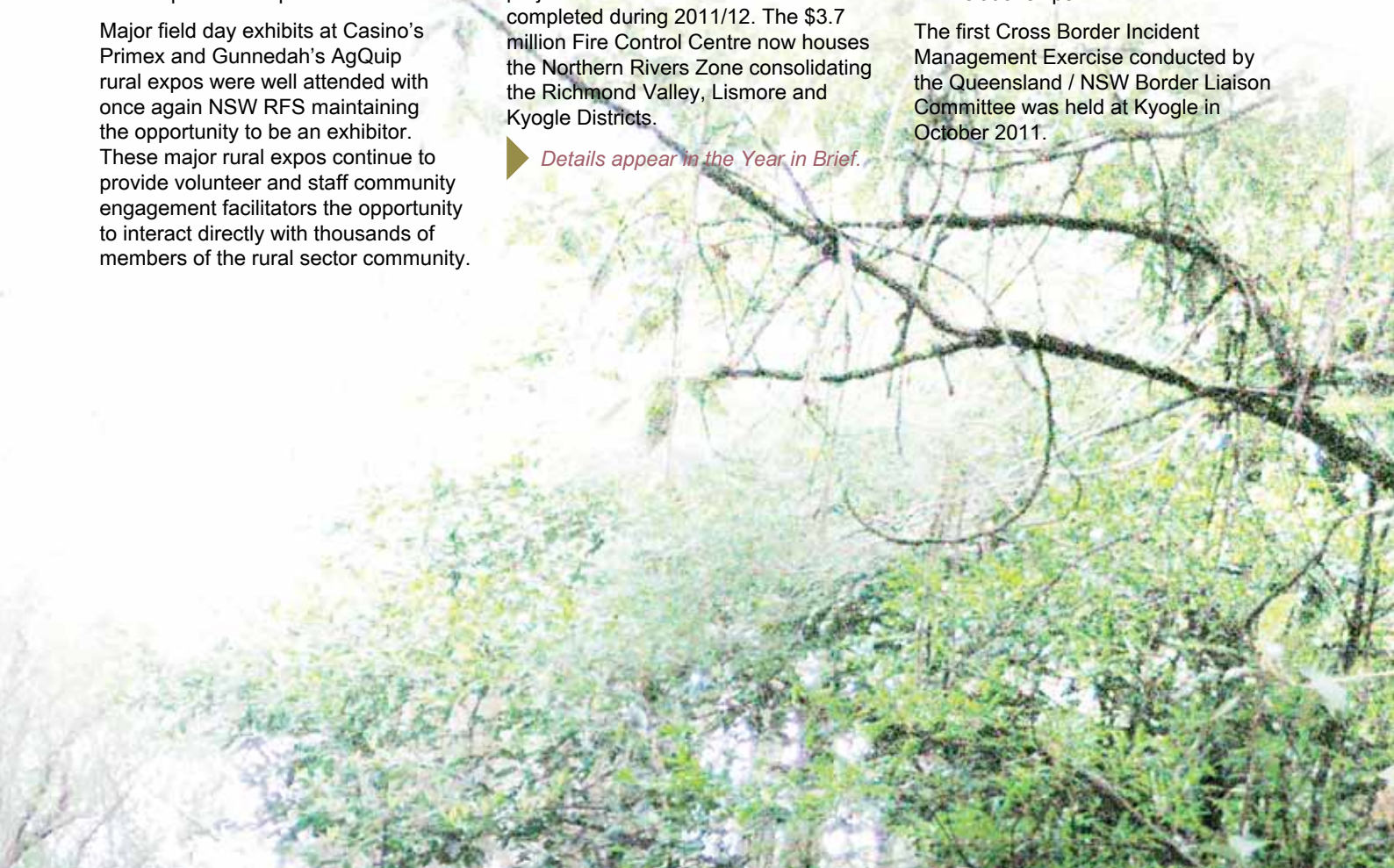
In addition to the Northern Rivers FCC Project, 59 other property related projects were completed across the Region during the 2011/12 period.

During 2011/12 25 new appliances, four second-hand appliances and a range of support vehicles were handed over to brigades in the Region. Improved server capacity was rolled out across the region in the FCC locations of Coonabarabran, Narrabri, Moree, Inverell and Tamworth ensuring increased IT capacity and reliability.

Region North continued to maintain and build relationships throughout communities both through emergency service agencies and other relevant stakeholder and interest groups including the following:

- District Liaison Committees monitoring Council Service Agreement arrangements and performance
- Bush Fire Management Committees contributing to cross agency coordination and cooperation
- Queensland / NSW Border Liaison Committee enhancing interstate operational coordination
- District and Local Emergency Management Committees maintaining local agency relationships

The first Cross Border Incident Management Exercise conducted by the Queensland / NSW Border Liaison Committee was held at Kyogle in October 2011.





# region north

## Annual Regional Exercise



*The annual Region North Exercise has been a real success story for the Region. 2011/12 was its 11th year and 428 volunteers and staff attended the Exercise in March. This year scenarios involving external agencies provided new skills including counter terrorism, electrical safety, leadership, LPG safety, First Aid and search for missing persons.*



## Moree Floods Trifecta

Flood events across northern and western NSW caused havoc in the reporting period and Region North was busy assisting the State Emergency Service throughout.

Moree had three major flood events in November, December and February. The town of just over 8,000 people suffered the first flood in November 2011 and more severe flooding in December when the Mehi River peaked at 10.2 metres. Severe flooding returned again in February 2012 when the town experienced over 300mm of rain in four days leading to the evacuation of over 2,000 people.

Narrabri and Gunnedah were also affected by severe flooding causing significant damage to property and public infrastructure.

The NSW RFS played an important role in supporting NSW State Emergency Service (NSW SES) volunteers and other agencies such as the Department of Primary Industries. At the height of the flooding events, the NSW RFS had close to 100 members deployed on any one day, assisting affected residents with transport, medical transfers, evacuation and food deliveries.

The NSW RFS support also included extensive deployment of aviation resources, with up to 40 aircraft in use at any one time. The Service provided airbase operations and important communication and logistical support across the affected areas, such as at Moree Airport.

When the floodwaters started to recede, volunteers assisted with the recovery efforts with crews working with residents and other emergency services to hose out homes, clean public areas and remove debris.

## A centre of excellence for Northern Rivers

A major achievement in Region North for the reporting period was the completion of the Northern Rivers Fire Control Centre Complex located at Casino Airport.

It is the largest Emergency Management facility in the Far North Coast's history and combines three NSW RFS Districts – Lismore, Kyogle and Richmond Valley. The state-of-the-art building also houses the Yorklea and the Northern Rivers Support Brigades.

Planning for the new \$3.7 million facility began in 2008 and was made possible through a partnership between the NSW RFS, State Government, Richmond Valley, Lismore and Kyogle Councils.

The Fire Control Complex has been designed to act as a hub for major emergency operations; boasting 18 vehicle bays, workshop facilities, training rooms and equipment stores. The brigades also have an industrial kitchen,



The new Northern Rivers Fire Control Centre Complex seen from the air. Photo by Steve Nixon

storage for six trucks, a dry store and access to meeting rooms on site.

The Fire Control Centre is located at the Casino Airport making it easier to send firefighting aircraft to rapidly developing bush fires in the area.

Multiple organisations such as the police, paramedics and Fire and Rescue NSW will use this resource for training purposes which will strengthen coordination between local emergency management agencies.

## Award for Valour goes to Kootingal volunteer

Tamworth District volunteer firefighter, Captain Kendall Thompson, who rescued over 40 people in the Queensland floods of January 2011, was presented with the Commissioner's Award for Valour at the 2012 St Florian's Day Awards on 4 May 2012.

This is only the third time that the NSW RFS has presented this award.

In January 2011, the aircrew of Helitak 220, sent by the NSW RFS to support rescue efforts in the devastating Queensland floods, conducted rescue operations over a two-day period in the Lockyer Valley in what could only be described as atrocious conditions.

Captain Thompson of Kootingal Brigade was deployed on a rescue helicopter as the down-the-wire crewman (person at the end of the winch below the helicopter). He was repeatedly inserted into the water, onto roof tops or onto floating cars. He was left to prepare and secure victims, call the aircraft in and either winch or hover-load people into

the helicopter for transport to safer ground.

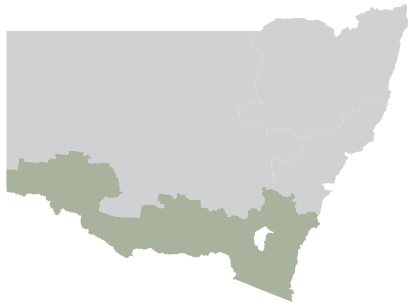
Over these two harrowing days, the helicopter crew, with Captain Thompson down-the-wire, rescued an elderly couple and their family dog trapped inside a house that had been swept downstream, a family trapped on top of their car, and many people rescued from rooftops, clinging to trees and just holding on in raging floodwaters.

Kris Larkin, Winch Operator/ Air crewman with the helicopter crew that day said that many people, "would have perished if not for his efforts. In the eyes of myself, my colleagues and associated rescue staff on site he has earned admiration and respect to himself and the organisation that he represents."

Kendall Thompson has received a number of other awards for his courage including the 2011 International Benjamin Franklin Fire Service Award for Valor.



# region south



## Key Facts

Volunteers	20,476
	Male 16,336
	Female 4,140
Incidents in 2011/12	3,502
Vehicles	1,714
NSW RFS Districts	11
NSW RFS Brigades	532
Square kilometres	169,060
Population	551,061
Landscape types	Native and plantation forests, coastal heathlands, alpine forests, flat and rolling grasslands

## Season Overview

Region South experienced above average rainfall over the 2011/12 season, resulting in a relatively quiet fire season. While no major fire emergencies were recorded throughout the year, a number of Local Government Areas experienced major flooding and storm damage. Extensive support was provided for these events both at the local level as well as the deployment of out-of-area brigades in the south west of the region including Tumut, Wagga and Griffith and surrounding areas. The Region deployed 15 Incident Management Team (IMT) specialist personnel to assist the NSW SES in flood preparations, evacuation and recovery. See the following pages for more details about this deployment. A number of aviation specialists were also deployed to Bourke, Lightning Ridge, Wagga Wagga and Griffith to manage the aviation resources in support of the floods.

Across the Region, Community Safety staff were involved with a wide range of activities including development application assessments, community engagement activities, issuing

fire permits and hazard reduction certificates, as well as dealing with hazard complaints. There was strong involvement with the development of Bush Fire Risk Management Plans and Community Protection Plans in areas of high risk.

## Reducing hazard

Hazard reduction activities continued to have a high priority during the reporting period, although affected by adverse weather conditions. Strategic works have been a priority, particular in areas with known fire paths. A full report of hazard reductions, development applications, hazard reduction certificates and hazard reduction complaints appears in Appendix A.

► *Details appear in the Appendices.*

## Fire management training

Region South had five members completing the Incident Controller Major Incidents (ICMI) development program which qualifies participants to manage large scale incidents anywhere in NSW. Participants in the course have many years experience in IMT roles and have been identified as being the most appropriate to take on this higher qualification.

At the same time the region continues to build on its local incident management capacity with with extensive training



involving around one hundred members throughout the reporting period.

## Community Resilience

Pilots for Community Protection Plans were commenced in three local government areas, and a further seventeen plans have been prioritised for the coming year.

Bush Fire Risk Management Plans throughout the Region are currently being reviewed to incorporate changes in local communities during the past few years, resulting in increased community engagement and focus on strategic hazard mitigation programs.

Regional staff focused on developing better tools to support Community Engagement practitioners, with emphasis on the importance of the Bush Fire Risk Management Plans and the Prepare.Act.Survive. message. Staff attended six meetings of District Community Engagement Committees during the year.

A successful Incident Management Exercise (IMX) was conducted at Shoalhaven Fire Control Centre which included representatives from a number of external agencies. The exercise provided an opportunity to refresh the skills of the Region's experienced IMT personnel and to test the functionality of the Fire Control Centre during emergency situations.

## Our members

On Australia Day 2012, Group Captains Paul Gleeson and Christopher Powell were awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal for outstanding contributions to the organisation and people of NSW. Firefighter Paul Simpson of Shoalhaven District and Derryl Baine of Mid Murray Zone were worthy recipients of the Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery. Fifteen members from Region South were also awarded the National Medal for Service in recognition of their ongoing and committed service and 544 members received Long Service Medals.

The Secondary School Cadet Program has been very well supported this year with active programs being held Bombala High, Crookwell High, McAuley Catholic School (Tumut), Wade High (Griffith), Batemans Bay High, Mulwaree High, Braidwood Central, Karabar High (Queanbeyan) and Crookwell Rural Fire Brigade. Cadet of the Year for 2012 was Phillip Brunson from Tumut High School. See the following page for more details.

The Region's ninth Group Officer's forum was held at Wentworth, with 55 Group Officers in attendance. To enhance the cooperation between bordering agencies, a number of Group Officers representing the Country Fire

Authority (Vic), Country Fire Service (SA) and ACT Rural Fire Service attended the forum. The forum allowed senior volunteers to further engage in the Service's operational processes and management systems.

The Region hosted a number of Local Government forums, providing an opportunity for councils to discuss issues of concern with the Commissioner and Regional staff.

The Service is assisting Snowy Hydro Ltd with a training needs analysis for each of their Emergency Response Teams which are responsible for first response to incidents involving Snowy Hydro assets. Training programs are being developed to meet the identified needs and assistance in the delivery of the training is also being provided.

## Organisational Capability

2011/12 saw the completion of the new four bay station at Deniliquin as well as the commencement of the new Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) Fire Control Centre that is due to be completed in 2012/13.





## 2011 Cadet of the Year, Phillip Brunson

On Wednesday 16 May 2012, during National Volunteers Week, Phillip Brunson, a Year 9 student from Tumut High School was presented with the 2011 Secondary School Cadet of the Year Award. The Award was presented by The Hon. Michael Gallacher, MLC, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, AFSM in a ceremony at NSW Parliament House.

The Cadet of the Year Award was established in 2009 within the NSW RFS and NSW State Emergency Service to acknowledge the efforts of a young person in each of the respective

cadet programs. The award is designed to promote learning, leadership and the values of volunteering and community service.

During 2011, around 800 students participated in the program. Phillip was selected for the Award because of his high degree of leadership and teamwork; determination in completing all tasks; and for being an outstanding representative of his school and community. Phillip also displayed a high level of personal growth throughout his participation in the program.

Phillip is an exceptional young man and is always first to get involved in

community activities. In addition to his participation in the Secondary School Cadet Program, Phillip has been Captain of the Tumut Cadets for more than 12 months and led his team at the Australian Fire Cadet Championships in 2011.

Phillip suffers from Cerebral Palsy, although he has not once allowed his disability to deter him. As a result of his determination and hard work Phillip has risen to be an outstanding star in the Secondary Schools Cadet Program. Phillip embodies the true spirit of the NSW RFS and volunteerism.

## Flooding Brings out the Team Spirit

Exceptionally heavy rainfall across most of the State broke records in many areas especially across the south east. A persistent rain band began on the 27 February and over the next week most of inland southeast Australia recorded accumulated rain totals of more than 100mm.

Due to the heavy rain in NSW and earlier floodwaters making their way down from Queensland, the Murrumbidgee River in Wagga Wagga rose to levels not seen since 1974. The rising floodwaters tested the river's levee which had a recorded peak of 10.7m in 1974. After much waiting and watching the river eventually peaked at 10.56m. Almost 8,000 people living or working in the Wagga Wagga CBD were evacuated in anticipation of the levee being breached.

Mercifully, the flood peak was within centimetres of the breach mark. The NSW RFS deployed over 200 personnel to Wagga Wagga to assist the NSW SES. The deployment included local and out-of-area crews who worked alongside the NSW SES and other emergency services to door-knock, evacuate residents and sandbag.

### South West Floods – Key Facts

*2,258 volunteer deployments, many for up to four days per deployment*

*Public Information Centre – 235 volunteer deployments handled over 14,000 calls for assistance*

*Volunteers doorknocked thousands of homes and businesses*

*Base camps established and maintained for over 700 evacuees and 310 volunteers, providing over 15,000 meals*

*740 aviation deployments each for multiple tasks*

*The State Operations Centre was activated for 16 days*

In Gundagai, NSW RFS volunteers assisted the NSW SES to fill more than 800 sandbags to help protect the town against the rising Murrumbidgee River.

In communities like Barellan and The Rock, NSW RFS crews were involved in helping locals with the extensive cleanup, hosing out homes, schools and

businesses. In the township of Yenda, crews hosed out mud, pumped out water and removed ruined furniture from more than 300 homes alone.

It was a similar story in the major town centre of Forbes where a predicted flood peak of 10.65m was expected to cause major inundation. As a result, major flood evacuation orders were issued to almost 1,000 residents. NSW RFS Cat 1 tankers were transformed into a much needed temporary public transport service. For three days hundreds of shop owners, nurses, police, teachers and students were shuttled through floodwaters to and from the Forbes CBD.

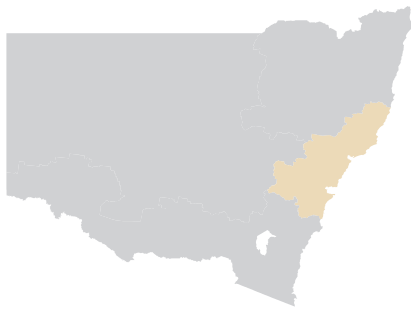
Inspector David Curry from Bland Temora Zone said he was impressed at the NSW RFS volunteers and the way they conducted themselves, "they are always willing to help out in any crisis. I am proud to be involved in such a great organisation."

Garry Cooper Team Liaison Officer, Far South Coast Team, said the effort by crews was incredible. "Crews gave up work commitments and cut into holiday time to help out those in need in what was a fantastic team effort."



Llandillo Brigade member Bill Melton and Group Captain Grahame Fothergill, AFSM from Illawarra keeping up morale in Yenda while crews put in the heavy work of cleaning up after the floods. Photo by NSW RFS Media Services

# region east



## Key Facts:

Volunteers	20,397
	Male 15,267
	Female 5,130
Incidents in 2011/12	9,447
Vehicles	1,679
NSW RFS Districts	17
NSW RFS Brigades	546
Square kilometres	55,874
Population	3,294,981
Landscape types	Urban interface, coastal heathlands, mountains and rolling farm and grasslands.

## Season Overview

The Region experienced a wet fire season, with only two Section 44 bush fire emergencies declared during the reporting period. Members managed 9,447 incidents, with a total of 29 strike team deployments to combat both fire and flood. The Region's 50 structural and wildfire Fire Investigators carried out 234 formal investigations leading to several arrests.

Despite the unseasonably high rainfall weather conditions, effective planning and preparation allowed for NSW RFS volunteers and staff to undertake burning and mechanical hazard reduction works.

A full report of hazard reductions, development applications, hazard reduction certificates and hazard reduction complaints appears in Appendix A.

► *Details appear in the Appendices.*

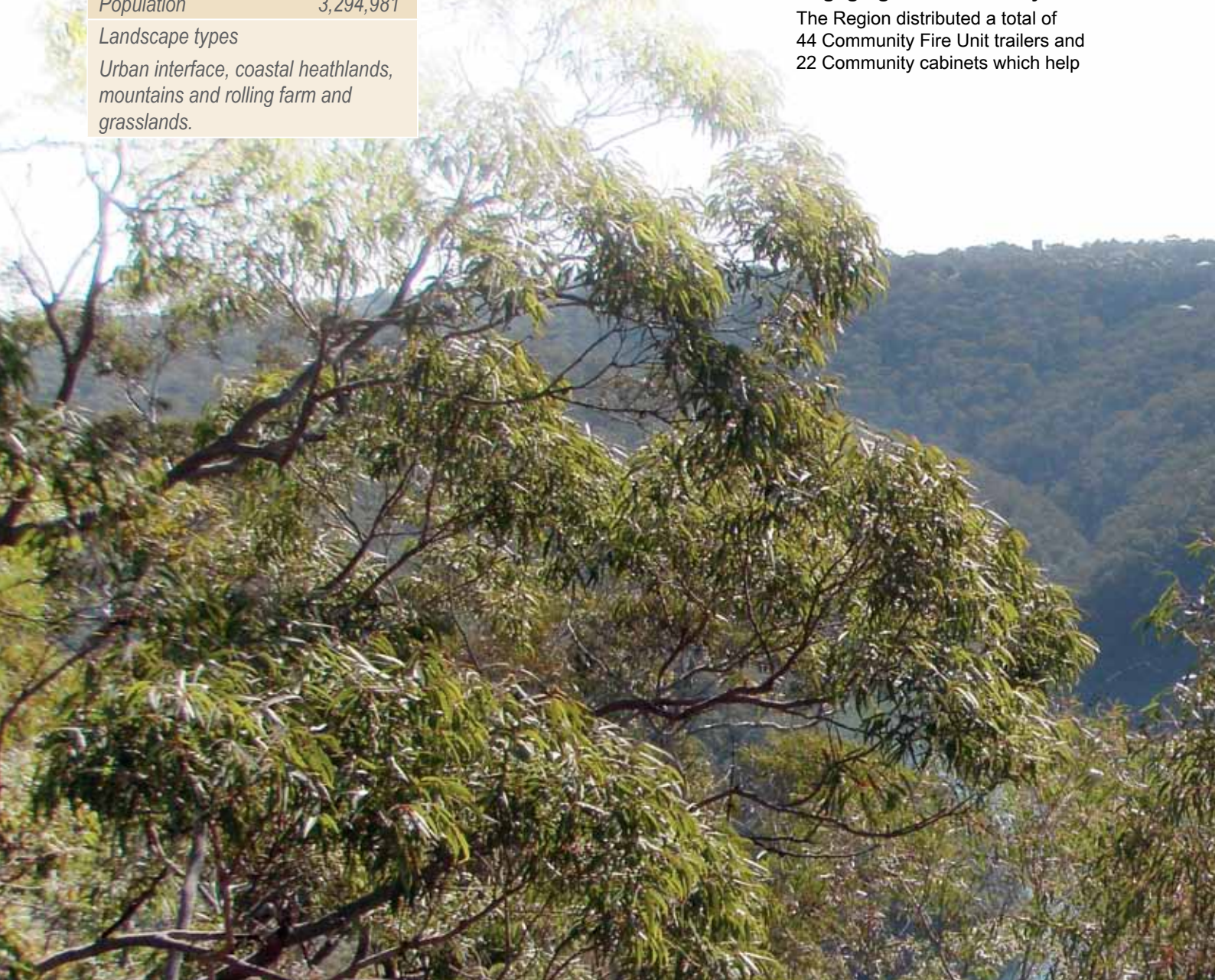
As a result of a quality review, enhanced Hazard Reduction Certificate and Complaints processes were implemented. Four additional Region East staff gained their Certificate Issuing Officer accreditation allowing them to issue Hazard Reduction Certificates (environmental approvals) to private landowners wishing to undertake hazard reduction clearing on their properties.

Region East assisted Regions South, North and West with significant flood activity and deployed 169 members to operate within the Police Incident Information Centre over a period of two months.

Members of Region East were also involved in Operation Dirkin, supporting the NSW Police Force in the apprehension of a fugitive. The operation saw the deployment of a significant number of volunteers and staff from across Region East.

## Engaging the community

The Region distributed a total of 44 Community Fire Unit trailers and 22 Community cabinets which help



community members protect their own and their neighbour properties in the event of a major fire.

Region East volunteers and staff undertook 1,636 activities designed to enhance the resilience of the community, including street meetings, cadet programs, static displays at shows, Firewise groups, Open Days and door knocks. Sixty volunteer members met and shared their experiences of successfully engaging the community at the 2012 Region East Community Engagement Forum held in the Blue Mountains.

A further 177 volunteers and staff from across the Region developed their skills and knowledge of how to engage the community on fire safety by attending the 2012 Australian Community Engagement & Fire Awareness conference held in Wollongong.

Locations within Baulkham Hills, Warringah-Pittwater and Blue Mountains participated in the pilot project producing community protection plans, with the outcomes of the pilot set to be rolled out across the State over the coming years.

## Our members

The Region hosted 63 events during the reporting period. These events included medal presentations with approximately 1,037 members presented with awards for service.

Region East was well represented in the list of those receiving Australian Fire Service Medals (AFSM) this year including: Group Captain, Jeffrey Bower, Mid Coast; Deputy Captain, Russell Deaves, The Lakes; Deputy Group Captain, Bruce Walton, The Hills; Captain, Donald Langdon, The Hills; Group Captain, William Lea, Hornsby/Ku-ring-gai; Volunteer, Geoffrey Olsen, Hunter; and Superintendent David Phillips, Gloucester/Great Lakes.

The inaugural Courage Under Fire saw three young members from Region East, descendents of fallen firefighters, make the trek to Kokoda in May 2012. The project was led by volunteers and staff from within Region East and the three young members were: Kristian White, Sutherland District; Ben Nolan, Illawarra Zone; and Ivan Moses, Far North Coast.

Another successful Regional Exercise was held at Cataract Scout Park at Appin which included a counter terrorism awareness session delivered by the NSW Police Counter Terrorism group.

The Lakes Team hosted this year's Cadet Championships held at Myuna Bay in October 2011 with 30 teams participating from across Australia and New Zealand.

Several exercises were held this year with Region East staff assisting Police with their Counter Terrorism Training, including a major exercise within Sydney Olympic Park.

The Region's Fire investigators participated in joint training with the NSW Police Force Arson Squad & Forensic Services Group. The training enhanced the investigators' knowledge, skills and experience across a broad range of investigative techniques and strategies.







Along with the opening of the station several Long Service Medals were presented. Here Tony Wilkes from the Linden Brigade proudly sports his NSW RFS Long Service Medal, First and Second Clasp for 32 years of service to the NSW RFS. (L-R): Roza Sage, Local State Member of NSW (Blue Mountains), Louise Markus, Local Federal Member for Macquarie, Terry Wilkes, Linden Rural Fire Brigade, First Aid Officer, Councillor Howard McCallum (Past) Councillor Fiona Creed (Past) and NSW RFS RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. Photo by Brad Bridger

## New Valley Heights station open for business

The new Valley Heights Brigade Station in the beautiful Blue Mountains was officially opened on 31 March, 2012 by Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons and other dignitaries. The new station was built at a cost of over \$750,000.

The new station, situated in a prominent position on the Great Western Highway, provides the station with a higher profile and will help build community awareness about the Brigade.

Currently the station is mainly for the use of the Valley Heights Brigade but it will also have an added benefit

with brigades from across the Blue Mountains using it from time to time for meetings and training activities. The new Station will also be used by other groups for community-based activities.

Commissioner Fitzsimmons formally opened the station and also unveiled a new mobile field kitchen. He said that the Blue Mountains region should be proud of their new Station in what is widely recognised as having some of the most bush fire prone land in the world.

"Our volunteers here in the Mountains are up against some of the most

challenging terrain and conditions in the world," he said, "and the Service is proud to support these dedicated members."

The official opening was attended by over 300 people and featured the Service Pipes and Drums Band, while the State Protocol Team coordinated all the formalities including conducting a flag-raising ceremony.

Several Long Service Medals were also presented on the day to volunteers from the Blue Mountains area.

## Cadet Championships 2012

The nation's youngest fire service volunteers had the opportunity to put their firefighting skills to the test in the reporting period at the third Australian National Fire Cadet Championships.

Co-hosted by the Service and the Rural Fire Service Association the Championships were held in Region East at the Myuna Bay Sport and Recreation Centre.

The Championships held in early October 2011 were an outstanding success with a record 30 participating teams from across Australia and New Zealand. Established in 2007, the Championships are held every two years and are designed to bring together cadets from across the

country to have fun, participate in friendly competition and promote the values of emergency service volunteering.

The nine competition events test the skills, initiative and safety procedures of the cadets. Teams competed in the portable pump relay, tanker and ladder, station response drill, and knapsack relay among others. Also introduced in 2011 were a range of non-competitive activities which were all well received.

Two NSW RFS teams jointly took out first place in the Championships – Oakville Cadets and South West Cadets, closely followed by Western Australian team Serpentine Jarrahdale Sierra.



The action at the capital National Fire Cadet Championship. Photo by Anthony Clark

## 2012 NSW RFS Courage Under Fire – RFSA Kokoda Trek



Kokoda trek participants David Patton, Ivan Moses, Kristian White and Ben Nolan. Photo by Paul Sweeney/Jason Heffernan

A project focussed on supporting the descendants of fallen firefighters was launched in the reporting period.

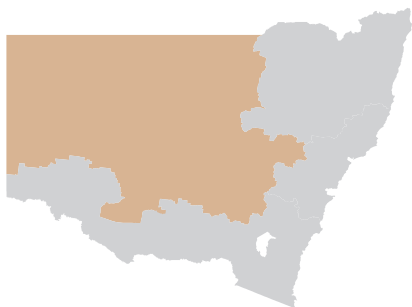
Under the leadership of Chief Superintendent John Parnaby, a team of volunteers and staff from within Region East initiated the 'Courage Under Fire' project to honour those NSW RFS members who had given their lives while on duty.

Young people who are the children or grandchildren of those fallen firefighters are taken on the Kokoda Trek as a way to help them experience and understand the values at the core of NSW RFS: courage, endurance, mateship and sacrifice.

The inaugural NSW RFS Courage Under Fire – RFSA Kokoda Trek was held in April 2012. The RFSA was the major partner for the project.

Three young members who participated in the inaugural Trek were from Region East: Kristian White, Sutherland District; Ben Nolan, Illawarra Zone and Ivan Moses, Far North Coast. A total of four staff and eight volunteers participated in the first year and plans are in place to repeat the initiative in 2013.

# region west



## Key Facts:

Volunteers	15,523
	Male 12,856
	Female 2,667
Incidents in 2011/12	2,330
Vehicles	1,467
NSW RFS Districts	9
NSW RFS Brigades	561
Square kilometres	422,600
Population	273,041
Landscape types	
<i>Region West covers more than 62 percent of the State. It is mostly open grasslands with cropping and grazing. The tablelands country around Mudgee and Orange is heavily timbered.</i>	

## Season overview

Once again above average rainfall across the Region has added to the grass fire threat. A second body of dry fuel has now formed on top of the previous year's growth. This increase in fuel loading will increase the intensity of grass fires if the summer turns dry as predicted by the Bureau of Meteorology.

Region West Brigades responded to 2,330 incidents during the reporting period with around one third of those being bush and grass fires. 4,407 crew were deployed from Region West throughout the year utilising 1,525 appliances, 97 items of heavy plant with 26 aircraft being tasked.

There was one S44 bush fire emergency declared within the Region for the 2011/12 fire season in the Cobar/Central Darling LGA's and the Unincorporated Area. During the S44 in excess of 11,000 hectares in western NSW was impacted. Sixty personnel and 17 items of heavy plant were tasked to control the numerous fires in these areas that were ignited by lightning strikes.

Region West crews also assisted the Country Fire Service (SA) to combat and contain a 95,000 hectare fire at Quinyambie.

Region West crews and staff assisted the NSW SES in flood relief operations from 4 February - 25 March 2012. The Region had a total of 752 staff and volunteers involved in response teams.

Seventy fire investigations were carried out in Region West in the reporting period.

## Hazard management

Hazard Reduction in the reporting period has been focused around isolated villages with the installation of Asset Protection Zones and Strategic Fire Advantage Zones. This was achieved through funding from the Roadside Vegetation Program that saw mechanical/spraying/burning along strategic roads leading in and around villages. Burning along major strategic roads was completed in all Districts with the assistance of the State Mitigation Support Services in the preparation of control lines along fences and infrastructure.

The majority of the works were completed, which was remarkable with the wet weather conditions that were experienced.



A full report of hazard reductions, development applications, hazard reduction certificates and hazard reduction complaints appears in Appendix A.

► *Details appear in the Appendices.*

## Community resilience

Community Protection Plans were initiated after recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. In the reporting period the CPP were a priority with ten new communities targetted. A pilot plan was run at the village of Cumnock, which included two community consultation forums. The plan is almost completed identifying new protection measures and treatments.

A working committee of Region West staff and Customer Service Centre staff are developing the map based plan for grasslands that will be rolled out to other grassland districts.

## Our members

In the reporting period, a total 437 Long Service Medals, three National Medals and two National Medal Clasps, totalling thousands of year's service to the community of NSW, were presented to members.

Region West volunteers from the Goodooga Brigade were recipients

of a Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation for the assistance that they provided to their local community.

## Building capability

2011/12 saw the completion of the Region's third standard design Fire Control Centre for Bland Temora Zone, located at West Wyalong. Region West also delivered the first standard design brigade station to be built in the State, a Category 3B for the Nashdale-Canobolas Brigade.

A volunteer and brigade workforce plan was developed and will be piloted by a number of Region West brigades in 2012/13. This workforce plan includes strategies to assist with brigade level recruitment, succession planning, flexible training and community engagement.

Region West is utilising an on-line internet based learning system to better enable remotely located and busy members to undertake the theory components of mainstream training. The system currently hosts Bush Firefighter, Crew Leader and Group Leader courses with the recent addition of First Aid Application. This system, was developed by a senior Region West volunteer and allows members to complete all course theory components prior to attending a practical skills application session and practical assessment.

A focus in Region West for the reporting period has been local District radio communications teams. Two regional coordinated communication courses were held to increase the number of members qualified to work within a communications team.

## Partnering with Aboriginal communities

Region West formed a partnership with the Lachlan Catchment Management Authority to redevelop traditional burning amongst Aboriginal communities. Sixteen Aboriginal members were trained in Bush Firefighter with a further ten to be trained in the future. The NSW RFS has assisted with training in burning techniques and have completed burns in the Canobolas Zone National Parks.

The Bush Fire Resilience for Aboriginal Communities project was a feature of the reporting period. This project, funded by the Ministry of Police and Emergency Services, involved a project team completing bush fire and structure fire risk assessments in 32 Aboriginal communities throughout NSW. Read more about this project on the next page.

► *Details appear in the Year in Brief.*



## Bush Fire Resilience for Aboriginal Communities project

In some remote Aboriginal communities, the risk of bush fire is ever present and some communities may be particularly vulnerable. In the reporting period, the NSW RFS Region West worked with these communities to better develop bush fire survival plans and engaged the community in having a say in what decisions are made.

The Bush Fire Resilience for Aboriginal Communities project was authorised through the successful application for a grant under the Natural Disaster Resilience Program by Region North. Funding for the project has been provided by the NSW State Government and the Commonwealth Government through the NSW Ministry for Police and Emergency Services, for the 2011/2012 year.

The Project involved a NSW RFS team visiting Aboriginal communities throughout NSW and making bush fire and structure fire risk assessments. Detailed risk assessment reports were generated with priority actions to mitigate bush fire and structure fire hazards listed. Thirty four Aboriginal communities have been identified as suitable for the project and in the reporting period 25 of the 34 were visited. Twenty three of the 25 communities visited have a draft report prepared.

This project has allowed a strong partnership to develop between the NSW RFS and the State Aboriginal Lands Council. One of the aims of the project was to seek involvement and advice from the local Aboriginal community on what they see as the

hazards and the risks to their community and what they would like to see happen to lessen the risk of bush fire.

Although the project deals primarily with the risk of bush fire for each community, the project also takes into account fire in general within Aboriginal communities and addresses such issues as illegal burning and household fires.

Project Officer Superintendent Trevor Reeves said support for the project from the communities has been exceptional.

“The risk of fire is a real concern and the risk it poses to many of the communities is evident,” he said, “This report will assist many agencies and organisations in identifying areas of concern within our discrete Aboriginal communities and will hopefully lead to better informed and safer Aboriginal communities.”



A comprehensive risk assessment of the Cabbage Tree Island Aboriginal Community in cooperation with the Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) and local NSW RFS was part of the Bush Fire Resilience for Aboriginal Communities project. (L-R) Des Boorman (TAFE NSW), Rodney Cameron (Wardell RFB) and Marcus Ferguson (Green Team Work Supervisor, Jali LALC). Photo by Trevor Reeves

## Dry lightning strikes cause havoc

Lightning strikes in the Far West area in late September 2011 started numerous fires. With hazardous fire weather predicted a Section 44 Bush Fire Emergency was declared on 28 September 2011. The declaration applied to Cobar, Central Darling and the Unincorporated Area.

A series of lightning strikes on Tuesday 27 September around 1300hrs started fires in the Menindee and Tibooburra areas. Within the hour a passing passenger aircraft reported a new fire east of Broken Hill. NSW RFS resources and heavy plant were deployed to all the fires. By early evening several more fires were being attended in the Ivanhoe area.

Adding to the concerns, two fires on the South Australian (SA) border at Smithville Station and Quinyambie, threatened to enter NSW. NSW RFS firefighters were sent to assist the Country Fire Service (SA).

Higher temperatures, stronger winds and further storm activity were predicted for the following day. With worsening fire weather there were concerns that local



A grader working along the dog fence building containment lines on the NSW/SA border. Photo by Mark Lacy

resources would be unable to manage and suppress the existing fires plus any new fires. As a consequence a Section 44 was declared early on Wednesday 28 September.

The afternoon of 28 September, however, was marked by heavy rain and thunder storms. By early Thursday

29 September a recommendation was made to revoke the S44 Bush Fire Emergency.

In total 17 fires burned between 28 and 29 September and a total of 11,000 hectares of grasslands were affected. Around 100 firefighters were involved in the fires.

## Goodooga Brigade Award

In the reporting period, Region West volunteers from the Goodooga Brigade were recipients of a Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation for the assistance that they provided to their local community.

The following members of the Goodooga Rural Fire Brigade were presented with the Certificate of Commendation: George Jackson, Guy Darcy-Shillingworth, Jamie Cubby, Keiran Weider, Leroy Lane, Stephen Cubby, Thomas Stanton and Captain William Pokarier.

The community of Goodooga became isolated on 22 March 2010 due to flood

waters that were making their way south from Queensland.

The NSW SES placed a forward command post at the Goodooga Bowling Club with a limited number of out of area crews from the NSW SES. The Barwon Darling Zone was asked by the NSW SES to supply personnel from the Goodooga Rural Fire Brigade to assist as it was expected that the town would be isolated for up to six weeks.

The Goodooga Brigade Captain William Pokarier indicated that an eight man crew was ready for any task that the NSW SES would require of them. One of the first tasks that they were assigned was the setting up of a temporary store in the township so the community would have supplies while the township was isolated. Fourteen

tasks were assigned to the Brigade amounting to 96.5 personnel hours. These tasks included loading and unloading aircraft, pumping out the inside of the levee at Weilimorange and wetting down the airfield to minimise damage to aircraft from dust and dirt.

Not only did the Brigade complete all tasks professionally and successfully, but also provided a few BBQ dinners for the out of town NSW SES and NSW RFS members in their own time.

The level of commitment shown by the Brigade over an extended period of time dealing with the various tasks carried out was well beyond that expected of it and brought credit upon the Brigade, the Barwon Darling Zone and the NSW RFS.

FRONT COVER PHOTO:

Part of the Roadside Vegetation Program, this roadside burn was on the Barrier Highway, about 170km west of Cobar. The volunteer in the photo was one of the Region East (Firefighter Steve Skinner, Valley Heights Brigade) crew who came out to assist the local brigades. It was a very successful burn. Photo by Robyn Favelle



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