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Wet summer poses dieback risk

Wetter than average conditions forecast for February to April have raised concerns of further dieback spread in Western Australia.

Warm temperatures coupled with increased soil moisture create very favourable conditions for the dieback disease to reproduce and spread.

South Coast NRM Project Dieback leader Annabelle Bushell said people should be wary of these risk factors and take precautions to avoid establishing new areas of disease.

“People should avoid activities through natural areas in these wet and warm conditions. Although this can be disruptive to their plans, waiting a couple of days for conditions to dry greatly reduces the risk of establishing new disease centres,” she said.

Phytophthora dieback is an introduced microbe of the soil which kills plants by destroying their root system. South Coast NRM’s Project Dieback team mapped this “biological bulldozer” as having infested over one million hectares of the South West leaving few precious large tracts of land disease-free.

Existing dieback management options are expensive and there is no widespread cure. Once it is introduced to a landscape it is there forever, thus prevention is the only defence.

To reduce the risk of picking up dieback infected mud and transporting it to other areas, vehicles and equipment should be cleaned of soil and travellers should stay on designated tracks and avoid muddy areas.

The South Coast NRM Project Dieback team is coordinating the development of the first state-wide online Dieback Information Management System to help WA industry, government agencies and the community prevent the spread of dieback.

South Coast NRM is also working in partnership with the Department of Environment and Conservation and other key stakeholders in priority areas surrounding Cape Arid, Fitzgerald River and Lesueur National Parks to implement disease risk reduction strategies to protect these areas from new infestations.

ENDS

Note: Pictures of dieback infestation available on request

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South Coast Natural Resource Management Inc. is the leading regional group for natural resource management in the South Coast region of Western Australia. As an independent not-for-profit organisation, we work with the community to improve the environment by preserving and protecting unique plants and animals, managing land and waterways sustainably, and sharing knowledge and skills in natural resource management.