



TROPICAL SAVANNAS CRC
Cooperative Research Centre for Tropical Savannas Management



Australian Government
Department of Transport
and Regional Services

Managing Fire in the Gulf Region, Northern Territory

The gulf region of the Northern Territory is a vast area of diverse landscapes, plants, animals and people. Despite its seemingly pristine condition, appropriate and ongoing land management and planning is crucial to the integrity and health of the region.

For 50,000 years these landscapes were managed by traditional owners, and burning practices in particular, significantly shaped the fauna and flora of the region. This interaction was disrupted when people no longer moved and lived throughout the landscapes as they had done previously.

Being sparsely populated, with limited infrastructure and services, the gulf is very reliant on a regional community approach to many land management issues. This is particularly the case with fire.



When used appropriately, fire is an extremely useful tool for managing land. It can also pose a serious threat to the livelihoods, property and ecology of the region when not managed correctly.

The uses and effects of fire in the landscape are diverse and complex, and depend on a multitude of variables. There are also a wide range of objectives being either

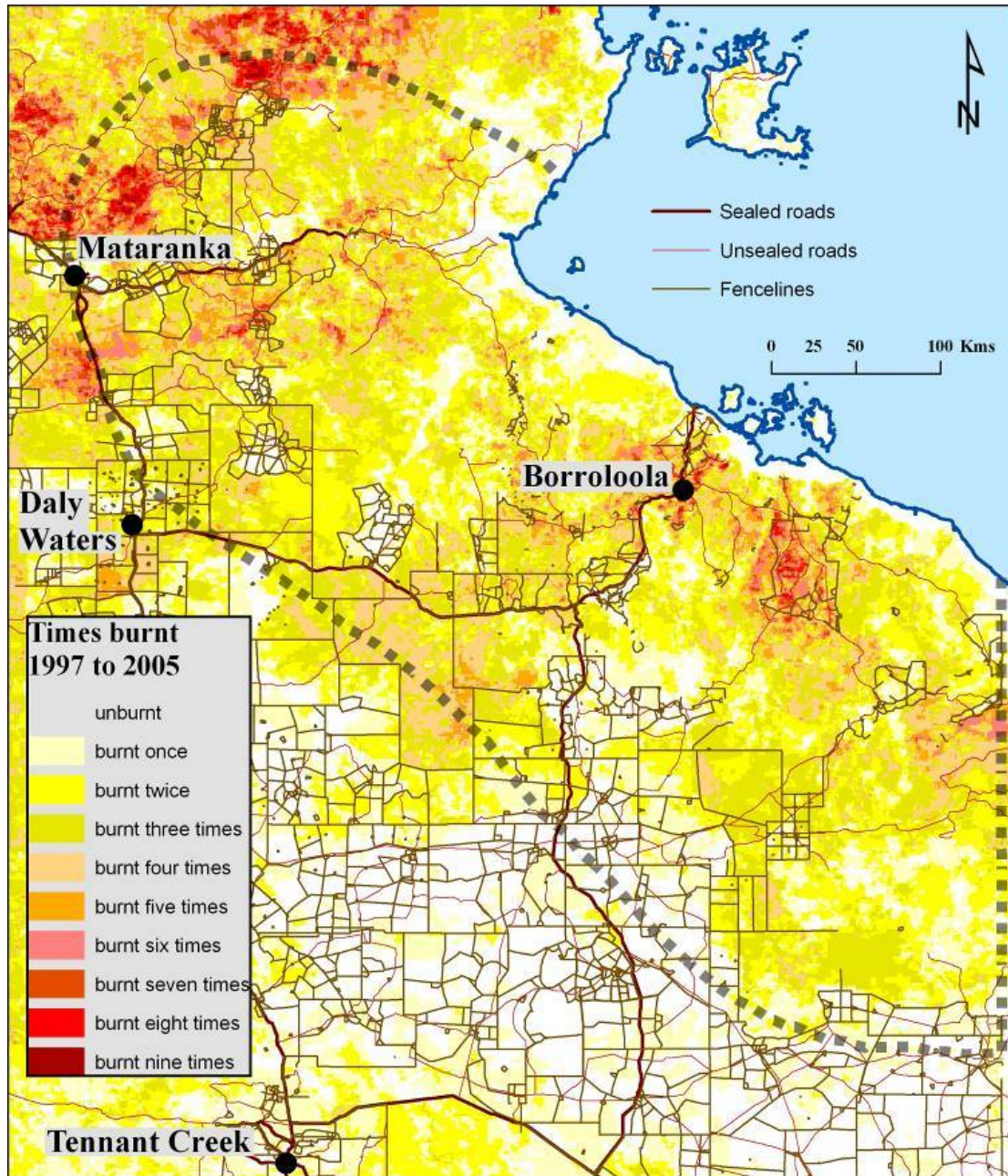
undertaken, developed, trialled or attempted across the landscape.



Currently, there is a prevalence of late dry season wildfires. These fires, although having specific uses for thinning woody vegetation and weed control, are generally not considered a desirable outcome. In most cases, there are limited options and resources to contain such events.

The threat of late dry season wildfires is currently one of the main incentives for conducting prescribed burns. Early dry season burning for fuel reduction and fire breaks, in many cases provide the only means of preparation for the possibility of late dry season wildfires.

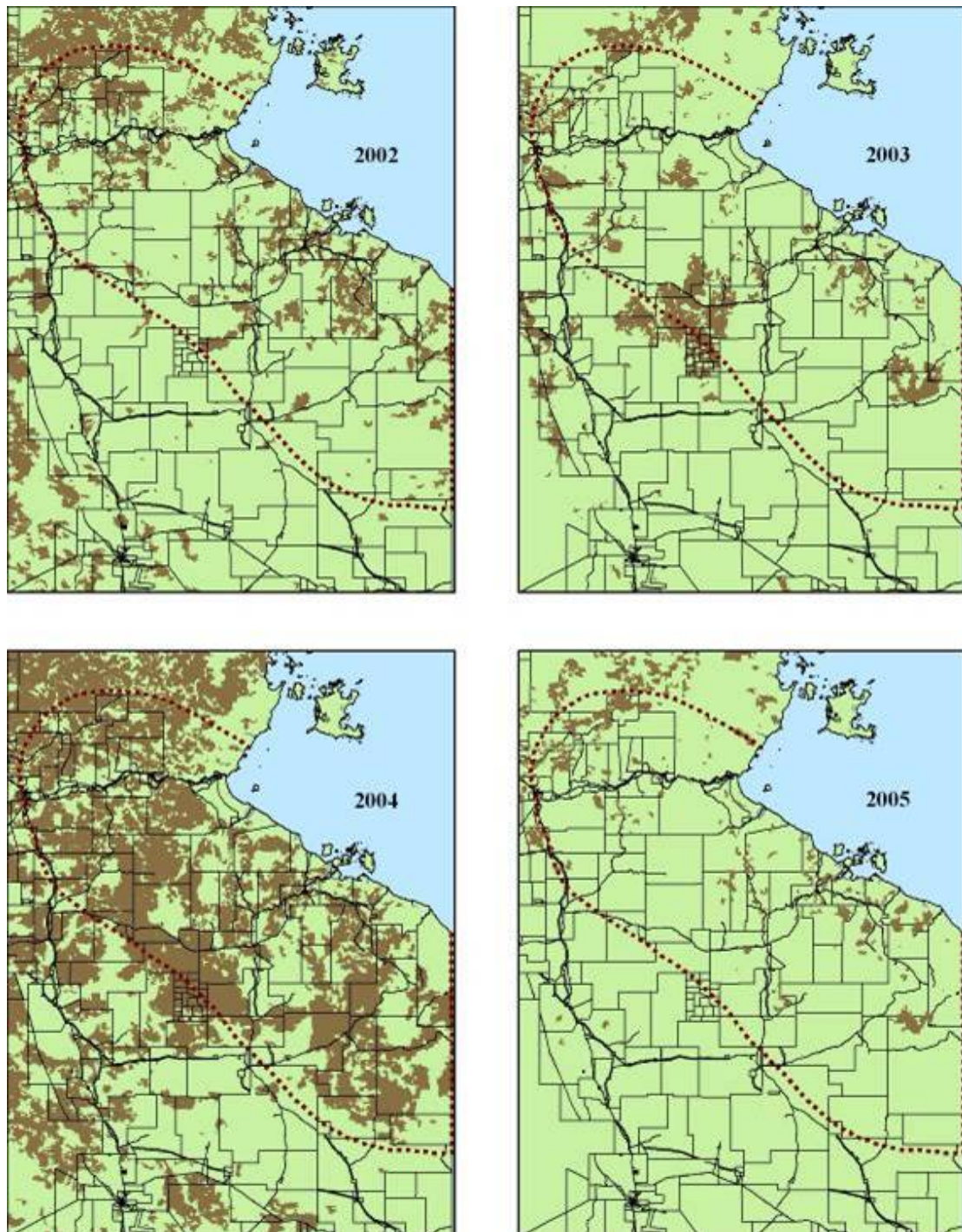
The following map shows the limited options for most ground based fire management activities. Large areas are unfenced with limited vehicle access. Many property boundaries are unmarked and unfenced. This becomes even more critical when mobilising personnel and equipment to contain uncontrolled fires.



Other strategies such as aerial control burning (ACB) and cultural 'fire walks' have their place in the comprehensive approach that is required to manage fire in the region. From both an ecological and wildfire suppression perspective, many areas would benefit from practices comparable to those of traditional aboriginal burning.

Fires move across the landscape regardless of any tenure, pastoral productivity and ecological, cultural or recreational values. As such, a collaborative regional community approach is required so the desired intentions and objectives of land managers and custodians can be associated with their respective portions of the landscape.

This is a considerable undertaking, given the size of the region and the complexities and intricacies of the landscape and its people.



Areas affected by fire show considerable variation from year to year.