

BOOK REVIEW

A Future in Flames. 2010. By **Danielle Clode**. Melbourne University Press of Victoria, Australia. 304 pages. Paper. US\$27. ISBN-978-0522857238

Author Danielle Clode, a researcher at the University of Melbourne, presents an intriguing look into the fire-prone ecosystems of Australia. “Bushfires,” a term used to describe the unique wildfires of the Australian bush, are a developmental driver for the ecological and human dimensions of this continent. This text presents a viewpoint that accounts for the historical and ecological interactions of fire, climate, vegetation, and humans in Australia.

The author sets the stage by explaining how the historical fire regime has largely been influenced by an interaction of climate, fire, and vegetation, and presents contrasting views on which variable was dominant. From mountain ash to blue gum trees and kangaroo to Leadbeater’s possum, numerous examples of fire-tolerant or fire-sensitive flora and fauna are offered throughout the book. Unfortunately, scientific names are not provided for plants in the book, which would have been an asset for readers not familiar with the common names of Australian flora. Well documented accounts of Aboriginal use of fire from the 1700s are provided and are similar to anthropogenic uses in North America and Africa (hunting, warfare, travel, spiritual uses, etc.). Some early European settlers adopted this use of fire, but Australia’s history is similar to other continents in that many disregarded the importance of fire, and suppression efforts proved to be problematic.

Through personal accounts, including her own, the author does a comprehensive job of documenting the psychological trauma associated with bushfires and the long-lasting impressions it has on people. Historical examples of devastating bushfires starting in the mid-1800s are presented with clear maps showing locations and extents of fires. Issues associated with the wildland-urban interface are discussed in depth, with explanations of risk and comparisons to similar areas on other continents. The author presents a compelling argument for personal responsibility for preparedness and education of landowners in high fire-risk areas. Descriptions are provided of numerous case studies of how to prepare one’s home and property; of how to decide between leaving or staying; and of the needs for legislative support for structural standards, training, and information.

Readers will appreciate that accounts of fires are typically accompanied with weather conditions

including temperature, humidity, and windspeeds. The author spends time explaining fire behavior in relation to weather, topography, and vegetation, and covers fire basics like the fire triangle, stages of combustion, and ignition sources. She emphasizes the importance of fire in the ecosystem and the need for proactive approaches to co-existing with fire, including prescribed burning.

This book is very well referenced with over 250 references from periodicals, government reports, and scientific literature. For anyone interested in fire ecology and the human dimensions of wildland fire, this book has themes that are common across all fire-dependent ecosystems. Fire ecologists and fire responders globally should consider this book, as its message has far reaching implications.

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