

# Fire Season Prep Checklist

For acreage owners in the Northern Rivers

## Why It Matters

NSW Rural Fire Service requires Asset Protection Zones (APZ) and access provisions around dwellings on rural land. Missing fire-season prep can void your insurance, trigger a council fine, or block fire-truck access in an emergency.

This is the practical version: what to do, in what order, by when. **It's general NSW guidance — your council and property may have specific rules. Always check with your local council before locking in a plan.**

## Northern Rivers Council Quick Reference

Council	Where to check APZ rules
Byron Shire	byron.nsw.gov.au — search “bushfire” or “asset protection zone”
Ballina Shire	ballina.nsw.gov.au — Planning & Development → Bushfire
Lismore	lismore.nsw.gov.au — Building & Development → Bushfire
Tweed Shire	tweed.nsw.gov.au — search “bushfire risk”
Richmond Valley	richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au — Planning → Bushfire

For all: NSW RFS guidance at [rfs.nsw.gov.au](https://rfs.nsw.gov.au) — start with “Plan & Prepare” → “Building in a Bush Fire Area” for APZ standards.

## Timeline

### June – July (12+ weeks out)

- Walk the perimeter — note overgrown sections, dead branches, blocked tracks.
- Confirm bushfire-prone land status with your council (free property report online).
- Book mowing contractor for the late-September pre-season cut **now** — they fill up.
- Service ride-on or autonomous mower — wet-season standing kills batteries and seals.

### August (8 weeks out)

- First major slash of long grass on perimeter and along access tracks.
- Clear built-up leaf litter near the dwelling, sheds, water tanks.
- Inspect and clear gutters — dry leaves are ember catchers.
- Check internal vehicle tracks: 3 m wide minimum, 4 m vertical clearance, no overhanging branches.
- Identify and confirm your two evacuation routes.

### September (4 weeks out — pre-season)

- Major APZ cut completed by **end of September** (this is the date that matters).
- Take date-stamped photos of the cleared APZ — file with insurance records.
- Test water supply for firefighting (RFS-fitting compatible).
- Charge / test backup generator if you have one.

- Sweep gutters again.
- Clear flammable items from within 2 m of the dwelling (firewood piles, gas bottles, plastic furniture).

### October – March (fire season — maintain)

- Mow the APZ every 2–3 weeks during active growth.
- Re-photograph APZ monthly (cheap insurance against an audit or claim).
- Re-clear gutters mid-season.
- Check evacuation routes after every storm — fallen branches block tracks fast.
- Monitor RFS fire danger ratings; have a Bush Fire Survival Plan ready.

## APZ Quick Reference

The Asset Protection Zone is the cleared area around your dwelling. Standard NSW RFS guidance:

- **Inner Protection Area (IPA):** typically 10–20 m around the dwelling, kept low and clear.
- **Outer Protection Area (OPA):** further buffer beyond the IPA, with reduced fuel load.
- **Total APZ width:** depends on slope, vegetation type, and Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) rating.

Steeper slopes and dense vegetation = larger APZ required. Your council and the NSW RFS *Planning for Bush Fire Protection* document set the specific numbers.

## Vehicle Access Checklist

Fire trucks are big. Your access has to fit them.

- Internal tracks at least **3 m wide, 4 m vertical clearance**.
- Turning area near the dwelling for a 9 m vehicle.
- Gates can be opened without a key in an emergency (or have a Knox-style key on file).
- Bridges and culverts rated to take a fire-truck load.
- Property number visible from the road, day and night.

## Paperwork to Have on File

- Insurance policy schedule.
- Council bushfire-prone land report.
- Date-stamped APZ photos (annual).
- Mowing contractor records (dates, before/after photos).
- Bush Fire Survival Plan (RFS template — free download).
- Two emergency contacts on every household phone.

### What's the right setup for your property?

Every acreage block is different — slope, vegetation, distance from road, water supply. A generic checklist gets you most of the way; the rest is property-specific. For a property-specific assessment of your fire-season vegetation management — what to mow, how often, and what equipment makes the September deadline achievable — get in touch with a local operator who knows Northern Rivers conditions.

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