

Desert Habitat Method trials

What is the Desert Habitat Method?

The Desert Habitat Method, or DHM, is a scientific way to track and measure the impact of land management work.

Its main purpose is to show how fire management affects spinifex country. This includes how fire affects native plants, bushfoods and bush medicines and the habitat available for native animals.

The IDA is working with ecologists and rangers to develop the Desert Habitat Method together.

Why do we need to trial the Desert Habitat Method?

The IDA worked with ecologists and rangers to develop the Desert Habitat Method. We used the knowledge and experience of Indigenous people from:

- Healthy Country Plans
- Indigenous Protected Area management plans
- fire management plans.

The Desert Habitat Method is only useful if it meets the needs of rangers. So, the IDA is now trialling the method using on-ground consultation.

We need advice from senior Traditional Owners and knowledge holders to make sure the method is strong, suitable, and useful. The trial will answer the following questions.

Does the Desert Habitat Method use local knowledge in a culturally appropriate way?

We need to make sure:

- that we have a shared understanding about how right-way fire looks for the Country we are working on
- that the method classifies different stages of spinifex recovery after a fire in a way that is meaningful for people and their Country.

Does the Desert Habitat Method reflect what is happening on the ground?

The method uses public information, like satellite images, vegetation maps and rainfall data. But we still need to check the information with visits to Country to make sure it is correct.

Does the Desert Habitat Method support rangers' own goals?

The method will only be useful if ranger teams understand how it helps with their own work and goals. The trial gives everyone the chance to talk, understand the method better and improve it.

At the moment, there are 4 ranger teams participating in the Desert Habitat Method trials. The trials will finish in 2026. The IDA hopes to get more funding to continue testing the method with other ranger teams.



Elder and ranger, Yalti Napangarti,
Desert Habitat Method trial
workshop, Kiwirrkurra IPA, 2024

What is involved in a Desert Habitat Method trial?

Ranger teams who participate in a Desert Habitat Method trial participate in 3 workshops.

Workshop 1

Workshop 1 runs for 3 days. It introduces the Desert Habitat Method and shows how ranger teams can use the method for monitoring.

Participants work together to make sure the method is meaningful and makes sense for their Country.

The workshop includes at least one day on Country, so everyone can see and connect with what they are talking about.

During the workshop, participants do early survey work, including:

- checking vegetation maps on the ground
- taking GPS-tagged photos of different spinifex growth stages.

It is important that senior Traditional Owners and knowledge holders attend, as the workshop discusses:

- what right-way fire looks like for local spinifex country
- which spinifex ages are important and why.

Workshop 2

Workshop 2 builds on the discussions and fieldwork from Workshop 1. It includes:

- checking the maps of important spinifex ages
- setting up photo points for monitoring
- mapping weeds.

The IDA holds this workshop on Country, within the project area. The ranger team chooses the location. It usually runs for 3 to 5 days, depending on the size of the area and track access.

Workshop 3

The IDA holds Workshop 3 over 2 days in a regional centre. All the ranger teams in the trial and other stakeholders attend.

At this workshop, participants:

- present and discuss their results
- share what they have learnt
- plan the next steps together.

Watch the workshop films

In 2024, the IDA held on-Country workshops with the Kiwirrkurra Rangers and Nyangumarta Rangers. They filmed stories about the workshops.

In these videos, participants share their experience of creating a new way to tell an old story about looking after desert Country.

[Waru Palya – Kiwirrkurra Fire Story](#)

[Nyangumarta Wika Muwarr](#)

What do participating ranger teams get out of the trial?

Ranger teams taking part in the Desert Habitat Method trial get several important benefits.

• Time and support to discuss fire management

Facilitators help rangers and their communities talk about fire management priorities and the results they want for their Country. These discussions can help ranger teams plan future fire work.

• A co-developed, scientific monitoring framework

Ranger teams help build the monitoring framework and get access to it. This makes sure the method is meaningful and practical for use on Country.

• Useful fire management tools

Ranger groups receive maps and planning tools to support fire management and decision-making.

• Clear reporting

The method gives rangers a clear process for reporting the outcomes of their land management work. They can share these reports with Elders, community members, partners, and investors.

• A project area ready for environmental accounting

The trial helps set up a project area that follows the Desert Habitat Method framework. This will help ranger teams access new investment opportunities, like nature markets, that require proof of environmental results.

The IDA is now developing a new method called the Rangelands Habitat Method. It is based on the Desert Habitat Method. The Desert Habitat Method trial will prepare ranger teams to use the new Rangelands Habitat Method. If the government approves the method, ranger teams will be able to use it to create biodiversity certificates.

IDA nature market fact sheet series

These documents contain general information only. Groups should seek their own legal, technical and financial advice before making any decisions regarding nature markets.

See more fact sheets [here](#)

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