

## Rare macadamia trees destroyed in bushfire

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Rare macadamia trees were destroyed in Queensland during last summer's bushfire season. Credit: AAP

A cluster of rare and important macadamia trees that were already at risk of disappearing has been destroyed by bushfires in Queensland.

Denise Bond and her team at the Macademia Conservation Trust watched nervously as fires edged closer to the Bulburin National Park last summer.

It was there that 150 rare macadamia janseni trees were discovered in 2018.

"(It) only grows along this eight kilometre stretch of one creek in the Bulburin National Park, so we were very concerned when we saw fire getting close," Ms Bond told AAP on Wednesday.

When she and her team were finally able to reach the burnt-out area in April, they were devastated by what they saw.

A third of the trees were gone.

That small patch of trees made up a quarter of the wild population.

New growth was seen sprouting from some of the charred trunks, but the group fears pest weeds will smother them and slow the recovery, if it happens at all.

"There's a lot of things against them (so) if they recover it'll take a long time and a lot of luck," field naturalist Keith Sarnadsky, who discovered the new grove, told AAP.

The species, first recognised by the scientific community in 1992, survives more than 200km further north than other commercial macadamia species, in hotter and drier conditions.

And it's that hardiness that means the plant could be the "saviour" of Australia's lucrative macadamia trade in years to come.

"The industry hopes that there might be genes in macadamia jansonii that could be bred into the commercial macadamias to help with climate susceptibility to global warming in the future," Ms Bond said.

There is a small insurance population in Gladstone, with another four to be created across the country this year.

But the group's focus has now turned to making sure the wild trees are safeguarded in the future.

They're not asking for a rescue bid similar to that used to protect the ancient Wollemi pine, but simply for better management of the pest weeds that choke new growth and act as kindling.

"We will now try and stimulate a collaborative effort with national parks and the landholders surrounding the park to have a landscape scale fire and weed management strategy," Ms Bond said.

"That's the glimmer of hope for the species."

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