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NZ Firefighters Salvage Victoria National Park

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A popular Australian national park ravaged by the Victorian bushfires has reopened with the help of Kiwi fire experts. The South Island members of a 57-strong crew returned to Christchurch yesterday after regeneration work in Wilsons Promontory, where a 36-day blaze sparked by a lightning strike burnt 25,200 hectares.

Rangiora-based Department of Conservation (DOC) fire officer Bruce Janes, who helped to fight bushfires in Melbourne in 2003, said the aim was to make the park safe for the more than 300,000 annual visitors to return.

His crew "black-edged" the area by back-burning vegetation.

Fellow Canterbury DOC officer Ray Bellringer said "the Prom" region was an icon for Victorians.

"It's like Mt Cook National Park to Kiwis. Parks Victoria really wanted to get it open again for the public and they were pretty blown away (that) we came in."

Janes said the sense of tragedy lingered during the trip.

"The sensation of the fire is only half of it; the recovery of the community is the other half, and that will be ongoing."

Some areas resembled "Armageddon", but Bellringer said large sections remained intact.

Janes expected the park to thrive.

"(Parks Victoria) want it to regenerate into a grassy moorland, so they want to get rid of the scrub.

"A wildfire obviously is hotter than a controlled burn, so there's more damage and it takes longer to recover, but it does recover."

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Written by Marc Greenhill

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