wombat NEWS and Views

newsletter for community management of the wombat forest

The Wombat News and Views is the newsletter for the Wombat Forest Community Forest Management Trial, endorsed by the State Government of Victoria.

Working Groups:

* **Biodiversity**
* **Wood Products**
* **Hydrology**
* **Pest Plants and Animals**
* **Non-Timber Products**
* **Recreation**
* **Tourism**
* **Heritage**
* **Education**
* **Tracks Forest Roads Operations**
* **Fire**

Contact Tim Anderson Community Development Officer 5348 6811 tim.anderson@dse.vic.gov.au for further information.

The deadline for Issue 7 is May 1st.
Please send articles and letters to the editor: Tanya Loos c/ Guildford Post Office Vic 3451, or e-mail unformatted word documents to pollen @netconnect.com.au

Short articles and letters of 500 words, or contact me to book a feature of 1000 words or more (5348 2778 AH). Thank you very much!

This newsletter was printed courtesy of the State Government of Victoria

Hello, and welcome to Issue 7! The Community Forest Management process has continued its work wholeheartedly over the past few months, since the last edition of the Wombat News and Views. There have been many important developments.

First of all, any type of community work can be exhausting, stressful and often frustrating; and nowhere else is this more true than in natural resource management! Especially forest issues... After two years of very hard work by all involved, and for a number of reasons, there are core issues in the CFM process that are yet to be addressed. As a consequence, we have 'lost' good people on the way – I can think of at least six unique, skilled and hardworking people that CFM is surely the poorer for their absence. We all hope that these people will come back on board if and when they see fit! We will still be here!
Secondly, thanks to the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Wombat CFM has been injected with that most useful of substances: money! Money helps us to carry out practical projects in the forest, something that many say the CFM process has needed for ages. Tim Anderson, Community Development Officer provides a short breakdown of the budget and proposed CFM projects on p 3. Therefore, at this stage, we have less people directly involved with CFM, but more resources! Please see p 3 for a list of opportunities to be involved with various Working Groups and Projects. Ken Dowling's article on Mountain Biking in the Wombat p14 also provides some wonderful food for thought on how we might best approach various aspects of CFM using strategic and long term planning.

For many people, staff and volunteers alike, the most pressing and stressful thing has been the work centred on the Wombat Sawlog Supply Plan. Despite controversy and some heightened tensions, all the stakeholders are still committed to the CFM process! See page 16, for further info. on the Supply Plan.

Finally, a humble thank you to the DSE and Council of Stewards, as the role of Editor is now a paid position. (see p 9) *Tanya Loos*

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Wombat Community Forest Management Forest Assembly

Saturday April 16th

Details to be confirmed: Phone Tim Anderson 5348 2211 for further information

Community Forest Development Officer Report

Wombat Community Forest Management has got off to a flying start this year. The newly formed Council of Stewards (CoS) has been involved in a range of activities.

The Council has appointed Hepburn Cr Michael Cheshire (currently Mayor) to the position of Chair. The Council has established its preliminary operating procedures and decision making approach. The CoS has identified the importance of group development, facilitation and dispute resolution training and are currently looking at submissions from possible providers.

The Council of Stewards was asked by DSE to consider forming a Reference Group to review and make comment on submissions to the sawlog supply process. The Council accepted the proposal and after discussion agreed that the Reference Group needed to be balanced in its composition. The Council has also been involved in other discussions regarding the process.

Another aspect to this year has been the opportunity for the Working Groups to look at running a range of CFM Projects. These projects are currently being worked into more detail by the relevant Working Groups using the same Project Planners that DSE use internally. It is recognised that all Projects need to be fully developed before they commence. The Council of Stewards will also be carrying out final approval of these projects.

The Projects cover a wide range of activities including:

- Weeds Mapping - Community Weed Mapping Project
- Complete road and track assessments and mapping
- Indigenous Heritage Project
- What is a Waterway Forum?
- Revegetation/ Regeneration Trial
- Wombat State Forest Biodiversity Project

One of the most pleasing features of the Projects has been the identification of common aspects within a number of projects and the opportunity for cross Working Group (WG) collaboration. The Tracks Forest Roads and Operations WG has an immense resource behind it via the members of a wide range of motorised recreational clubs. This has meant that the Weeds WG and the Hydrology WG have been able to add their mapping requirements into the T-FRO mapping project. This will mean that over 200 crews, equipped with GPS units will have accessed and mapped every road and track within the forest by June this year.

As part of my job to broaden the reach, opportunities and outcomes of CFM, I have been working on the development of two exciting projects. One has been the investigation of an iconic tourism development within the Wombat. After setting a number of criteria for such a project, a site in the Blackwood area has been tentatively identified.

Moorabool, Macedon Ranges and Hepburn Shires have lent provisional support and the Macedon Ranges and Spa Country Tourism Committee Inc are assisting in gaining attention from Tourism Victoria for further feasibility studies.

The attraction of the site is its open forest moving into a gully of ferns, blackwoods tall trees, all growing over the remains of what have been quite extensive mining during the late 1800's. A stunning area. The site is less than one hour from the Melbourne CBD and 20 minutes form the Western Highway.

The other project is looking at making linkages between our local schools and tertiary institutions, based on educational pathways based on Environmental Science and Natural Resource Management. This is still in its infancy but preliminary discussions suggest that there may be some quite exciting opportunities.

I believe that the Wombat CFM project has shown itself to be an effective vehicle for enhance dialogue between the community, DSE and other agencies and now, actual on-ground work. CFM's ability to work through the challenges of last year and start this year with so much promise is a beacon of light, through the sea of knockers. I congratulate you all.

Strategic Plan

The Council of Stewards is currently working on a Strategic Plan for CFM. The Plan will help to map the course ahead for CFM. The document is aimed at defining roles within CFM, the structural arrangements, it looks at issues that need to be in the strategic plan, projects and activities, timelines and components of CFM that in development, including incorporation.

The Council is reviewing a working draft and additional comments and suggestions are currently being considered. It is hoped that the Strategic Plan will be finalised by the Council of Stewards in the near future. The Plan will help to map the course ahead for

Community Forest Management and become a primary information document for CFM.

CFM Budget

The Council of Stewards has been given an operating budget for this financial year of $93 000. These funds are to enable the Council and CFM to operate in directions that CFM sets itself. The January Council of Stewards meeting worked through the requirements and direction of CFM for the remainder of the financial year. The budget has been provisionally allocated to:

- Forest Assembly- $ 1500
- Production of Wombat News and Views (12 months)- $4000
- Communications Fund- $8000
- Website Software- $500
- Council Training- $3000
- Council Expenses- $ 15000
- Working Group Projects- $61000



Article and photo by Tim Anderson.

Practical ways you can be a part of Community Forest Management...

Help us put together and present the next Forest Assembly on Saturday April 16th...Both help in the lead up and help on the day would be greatly appreciated.



Help out at a CFM information stall at various Shows and Woodchop events around the forest.
Volunteers get free entry and lots of fun chatting with each other and the public!

Come along to one of our many workshops, picnics or walks!

Posted throughout the Newsletter...

Monitor the plants and animals of the Wombat Forest: a chance to spend some time in the bush!
See p13 to help with Brush-tailed Phascogale, p12 To help with weed mapping.

Join a Working Group!

The many working groups are listed at the front of this newsletter.

Contact Tim Anderson on 5348 2211, e-mail tim.anderson@dse.vic.gov.au for further information….

Biodiversity Working Group Report



An exciting and informative workshop was held at Stewart's Creek on Sunday 23rd January, and attended by over 20 people. This experimental area was planted with pines in 1971 and has recently been logged, then slashed burnt and reseeded with eucalyptus species.

We were amazed to see a large array of native plants re-emerging. Large numbers of small Prickly Moses (Acacia verticillata) are evident. Has the seed been in the ground for over 30 years? There is also a large patch of a beautiful white everlasting daisy which we are attempting to identify.
This workshop was conducted by Murray Ralph, seed collector, author and member of the group. Murray supervised the collection of Musk daisy (Olearia argophylla) from along the creek to grow and assist with the revegetation of the gullies on the site. Some Blackwood (Acacia melanoxylon) seed was collected, but was old and may not be viable. Murray also supervised sowing of the seed which is being raised at the homes of a number of group members.

The BWG is also developing a project to be undertaken by a researcher to investigate biodiversity issues in the forest. The project will be funded from the CFM budget.

A few of us, together with wildlife carers from the surrounding district helped move the East Trentham Wildlife Shelter to a caravan paddock in Newbury. Everyone will be pleased to hear that Jon Rowden and Gayle Chappell have purchased a property near Daylesford and are in the process of moving again. Wildlife shelters require complex infrastructure. It is difficult to create an enclosure that a wombat cannot dig out of, and all enclosures must be fox proof.
Visiting the shelter has been a source of enjoyment for all of us. "Wattle" (a wattlebird) was so small when she arrived that Gayle had trouble identifying her. She now accompanies Gayle on walks with the Kangaroos. There is a little Sugar Glider who arrived less that 2 inches long and attached to her mother who had just died from a cat attack. He is now robust and active after being fed on a two hourly basis. He has grown hair and his gliding membrane is evident.
Gayle Osborne

Non-timber Products Report

At last Christmas is over and the CFM budgets season over. This budget will end in JUNE (end of the financial year) then we have to submit 04 /05 budget for our new projects. Now we can get on with spending our group's allocation.

Our first project is getting some training in **seed collecting**. I have made preliminary investigation into this training with the Creswick Landcare and Seed Bank. The single day training course will take place at Creswick. (10.00 am to 3.00 pm) so if any one is interested please come along and learn or revise your skills in this interesting subject. We do need to know number early to organise it so please let me know if you wish to attend. Date will be finalised after we have the numbers. Phone Graham Connell on 54262243 to book your spot, by 30/March.
Some interesting research has been done on Mundulla Yellows (MY) in Eucalyptus. This is a condition that eventually kills the tree
Researchers reversed the effects with the addition of mineral tract elements to surrounding soils. All the symptomatic sites studied showed alkaline subsoil and high salt levels along with lower levels of both Fe and Mn. Foliage analysis of effected trees showed lower levels of Fe and Mn and higher levels of Na and Cl. Symptoms were reversed after applying a dilute chelated Fe solution to E. camaldulenis seedlings grown in soil from the effected south Australian site in preliminary glass house experiments..The study is in its early phase but it looks good. Further info is available from the South Australian Dept. of Environment. This is from the report in the Australian Bee Journal DEC 2004.
Graham Connell

From the Universities…
Perceived benefits of prescribed burning in the Wombat State Forest.

By Tina Bell and Immaculada Oliveras, The University of Melbourne, Creswick

In a recent edition of Wombat News and Views we advertised for participants to help us in a survey to determine the perceptions of prescribed burning in the Wombat State Forest. We had a good response and would like to thank all of those people that took part. The results have been analysed and here we present a summary from the study.

Bushfires have been part of the Australian landscape for millions of years and have shaped the flora and fauna of the country. Fire has been used by Aboriginal people since their arrival 50 000 to 60 000 years ago. Bushfires during the summer have become a way of life including devastating and extensive fire disasters in 1939 (Black Friday), 1944 (Western Sydney Districts fires), 1967 (Tasmanian fires), 1969 (Victorian fires), 1983 (Ash Wednesday), 1994 (Sydney fires) and more recently in 2002-3 (Eastern Victoria and Canberra fires) and 2005 (Eyre Peninsula fires). During these fires, many lives have been lost, thousands of properties have been destroyed, tens of thousands of head of livestock have been killed and hundreds of thousands of hectares of public and private land have been burnt. As a consequence of such catastrophes, bushfire research has aimed to provide scientific justification for the principles of prescribed burning for hazard reduction and management of biodiversity.

Over the past 40 years prescribed burning has been used extensively in Victoria for fuel reduction and silvicultural and farming practices, and in a more limited way for environmental management on public land. A similar pattern has been followed in other Australian states. In the United States a change in public attitude was observed during the 1980s when the public no longer expected total fire suppression in forests and gradually became more aware that alternative fire management practices were beneficial. Consequently, the general public in America has largely accepted that there are both "good" and "harmful" roles for fire in ecosystems. It might be assumed that the Australian community holds similar perceptions of fire but little research has been done to determine this. Unfortunately, anecdotal evidence suggests a lack of understanding of the risk of bushfires. People choosing to live in fire prone regions must therefore have some level of expectation of both the associated risk and of the effectiveness of current fire management practices.

The aim of this project was to begin to determine the perceptions of prescribed burning practices in Victoria by the community and land managers. Three groups of people representing different forest usage and levels of knowledge of prescribed fire were targeted: (a) the local community likely to come in contact with the forest on regular basis, (b) professional land managers ('operatives') responsible for undertaking prescribed burning from The Department of Sustainability and Environment or Parks Victoria, and (c) local undergraduate Forestry students from the School of Forest and Ecosystem Science, The University of Melbourne in Creswick. The student group (28 participants) was chosen as they primarily use the Wombat State Forest for study purposes and they had learnt about fire behaviour, fire management and fire ecology during the course of their study. The operative group (33 participants) also had some degree of understanding of fire behaviour and ecology from their fire training. The third target group of people consisted of the general community associated with the forest (160 participants) living close to the Wombat State Forest permanently or on a part-time basis.

A short questionnaire was devised to give some insight into the ways in which the forest was used, to determine the level of knowledge of bushfires and prescribed burns in the local area and in Victoria and the perception of the appearance, effectiveness of protection and accessibility to the forest after prescribed burning. Other aspects included in the questionnaire were the issue of smoke from prescribed burning, the perception of the frequency and timing of burning and the effect of planned fire on flora and fauna. The questionnaire needed to be understood by the general community so it was written using plain language, avoiding technical words and complex ideas and mainly consisted of closed rather than open-ended questions.

Generally all groups had similar responses with undergraduate students being the most conservative and community members being the most opinionated. All participants claimed knowledge of prescribed burning activities within Victoria but fewer had experience of planned fires in the Wombat State Forest. All groups agreed that areas that had not been recently burnt had a better appearance than areas that had but this may have included different value judgements for different groups. For example, the definition of "appearance" is broad as it can be interpreted to apply to the effectiveness of the burn in terms of fuel reduction or to the visual appearance of the forest when everything is blackened.

It was widely recognised that different plants and animals respond differently to different types of fires and there was a strong call for greater research into the response of flora and fauna to prescribed burning. As there is already a substantial body of research that has

From the Universities...

been conducted in the Wombat State Forest and surrounding areas, it would appear that this scientific information is not being made available to or perhaps is not understood by the general public. Land managers arguably had a greater understanding of the ecological importance of season and timing of burning but some students and community members were equally knowledgable. Prescribed burning did not seem to impede access to the forest nor did smoke from prescribed burns pose any great problem. The majority of the participants felt that the amount of prescribed burning done in the forest was adequate for engendering a feeling of protection to life and property yet many were still suspicious of this management practice. A general feeling of unhappiness was expressed for the lack of consultancy with the community and provision of information by and from land management agencies. Interestingly, a number of community members suggested mechanical fuel reduction such as thinning, selective logging and collection of firewood as alternatives to fuel reduction burning.

Some written comments that were not directly related to questions raised several interesting points that may be explored in future studies. For example, the questionnaire was accused of ignoring the issue of biodiversity. In defence of our study, we aimed to survey the wider community presuming little previous knowledge of the effect, type and role of prescribed burning. This study was always intended to be an introductory exercise and it should be clearly stated that the results should be considered to be tentative at best and in no way conclusive. The sample size used was relatively small and participants did not necessarily represent the greater population. Clearly there is a component of the public that are highly educated in terms of fire behaviour and ecology and this should be explored in future surveys. Surveys with an interview-style format and open-ended questions would allow for more participant interaction. It should be noted that there is still a great deal of research that must be conducted to elucidate community perceptions.

Acknowledgments
The authors wish to thank the Spanish Government for providing financial support while IO was in Australia and to the School of Forest and Ecosystem Science, the University of Melbourne, the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre for providing practical support for this research. We also wish to thank Gayne Kirkhouse of the Country Fire Authority, Tim Anderson, Lee Gleeson and Tanya Loos of the Department of Sustainability and Environment for logistical support and Peter Shepherd, Don Oswin, Amanda Ashton and Alan York for useful discussions.

Some further reading

RA Bradstock JE Williams and AM Gill (eds.) (2001) Flammable Australia: The Fire Regimes and Biodiversity of a Continent. Cambridge University Press, New York, pp 462.
Department of Sustainability and Environment (2003) Ecological effects of repeated low-intensity fire in a mixed eucalypt foothill forest in south-eastern Australia: summary report (1984-1999). Fire Management, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria, Research report No. 57, pp 86.
AM Gill, RH Groves and IR Noble (eds.) (1981) Fire and the Australian Biota. Australian Academy of Science, Canberra, pp 582.
SJ Pyne (1991) Burning Bush. A Fire History of Australia. Allen and Unwin, Sydney, pp 520.



Our beautiful Wombat Forest, from Blackwood Ridge Rd., by Tim Anderson

Fire Working Group Report

At present many involved in the Fire WG are fairly pre-occupied with maintaining vigilance during the season. The Fire WG has not met for some time however it is aiming to meet to discuss a number of both pressing local issues and opportunities for further engagement with the broader community in relation to fire.

A tour of the proposed burn area in the Domino Road Trentham area has been arranged for Saturday 19th March at 10.00am and is open to all. Meet at the Trentham Football Oval.

The Bushfire Service of WA with the WA Gov and TAFE, have developed a Bushfire Awareness Training Program. The CD-ROM is to be reviewed by the Fire WG as to its applicability to existing Victorian programs or whether it could be further developed and enhanced. This would be a significant Fire WG Project to undertake however with the assistance and combined efforts of CoS, Working Groups, DSE, CFA, Community Fireguard Groups and 3 Shires, large amounts of consistent information could be developed and disseminated to the Wombat Communities. Information in relation to preparedness, vegetation and fuel management, biodiversity values, hydrological impacts, prescribed burn regimes, the use of fire as a tool, could all be included along with much more. This is something to look at mid year.

I will be travelling to Canada on the 9th of April and unfortunately will be offering an apology until the 12th of May when I return. My study of the Model Forest program in BC and Alberta will focus on the involvement of Local Government in the process within these areas. There is much more I would love to look at but I need to remain focussed on the topic for which I was funded by the MAV to look at. If any have contacts involved in CFM in SW Canada around the areas of Vancouver, Mission, Revelstoke, Jasper, Hinton, Calgary please let me know prior to the 5th of April

Cheers - Phil Millar ph **0437 098 126 or** pmillar@hepburn.vic.gov.au

The Three Lost Children: from the Cultural Heritage Working Group

The call of adventure

It was Sunday morning, 30 June 1867, when a group of young children from Connells Gully, near Table Hill, Daylesford, wandered in the direction of Wombat Creek past familiar shallow gold diggings to look for wild goats.

Three children, William Graham, aged 6 1/2, his brother Thomas, 4 years and 3 months, and Alfred Burman,5, responded to the call of adventure. They crossed Wombat Creek and headed towards Muskvale.

When the boys failed to return home for lunch, their fathers began to search, concentrating their efforts near the junctions of the Wombat, Stony and Sailors Creeks. That evening the police were notified, and the search went on well into the night.

During the afternoon the boys were spoken to at Muskvale by a storekeeper, Mr Mutch, but failed to follow his instructions on how to reach Daylesford. After a short distance, they unaccountably headed east to Specimen Hill. Towards dusk the children were spoken to by an older boy, John Quinn, near the Specimen Hill gold mine. He told them they were lost, but they ignored his attempts to turn them back and vanished into thick bush to their impending doom.

Organised searches

At dawn on Monday 1 July, the search began in earnest. As news of the previous day's sightings circulated, the search area widened. Community anxiety grew, and the next day more than 100 horsemen assembled near the Specimen Hill gold mine. By Wednesday 3 July, after a public meeting the previous night called by the Mayor, Cr Bleakley, public sympathy for the distressed families was so heightened that almost 700 people turned out in cold, miserable weather to continue searching.

The sorrowful discovery

After eight successive public meetings and 25 days of searching it appeared that the tragedy of the Three Lost Children might never be solved. But on Friday 13 September a dog returned home to Wheelers Hill, some 10km from Daylesford, carrying in its mouth a small boot with a child's foot in it. The following day a number of Wheelers Hill residents combed the area and found the bodies of the youngest boys in the hollow of a tree. The remains and clothing of the older boy were nearby.

There was a large funeral, and the three children were buried together in the Daylesford Cemetery. An impressive monument was erected there by public subscription – you can see it today in the Cemetery on the Daylesford Trentham Road.

In 1889, Mr Graham, the father of two of the lost boys, established a scholarship to be presented each year to the best boy and girl pupils at Daylesford State School. In this way the memory of the Lost Children has been kept alive in the Daylesford district.

Should you wish to explore this story in more detail, the Daylesford Museum (open weekends and holidays 1:30 -4:30 pm) has some interesting exhibits and information on this subject. Also the booklet "The Three Lost Children" is available for sale for $6.10.

The above story was reprinted with kind permission from the DSE, from a leaflet "The Three Lost Children Walk", published by the Department of Conservation and .Lands.

Ann Dobbs

Feature: Bacchus Marsh joins the Great Dividing Trail Network

The Great Dividing Trail (GDT) continues to grow, stretching across an ever-expanding area of the Central Victorian goldfields.

On Friday February 18, the Governor of Victoria, John Landy, patron of the Great Dividing Trail Association (GDTA), opened the 80km Lerderderg Track from Bacchus Marsh to Daylesford, at an impressive ceremony held at the beautiful Blackwood Mineral Springs Reserve. Also in attendance, immediately after running a long section of the new trail from Mount Blackwood to Blackwood, was GDT Ambassador, Steve Moneghetti.

The afternoon started with a call to order by Town Crier, Gavin Barker, and introductions by Mr Robert Dobrzynki, CEO Moorabool Shire. Cr Peter Russell, Mayor of Moorabool Shire, then outlined the history of the Lerderderg Track, and the support given by the Shire to the challenging project.
About 150 people were in attendance to hear the Governor speak of his long-standing interests in flora and fauna, and of the significance of the GDT in terms of the natural environment and the gold mining era, and indicated how impressed he was with the co-operation between the GDTA and various government departments, individuals and the Green Corp as a testament of what can be achieved by the community working together. Steve Moneghetti, an icon of Australian Sport, encouraged city people to use this pathway into the bush.

Barry Golding, GDTA President, then told the gathering how pleased the Association was to have completed the original plan conceived in the early 1990's, and expressed the GDTA's gratitude for the support it received from various State and local government and other bodies and individuals. In particular, he mentioned the co-operation and support of Mr Allan May of Moorabool Shire, Mr Chris Worrall, Mr Stuart Willsher and Mr Charles Dickie of Parks Victoria, Mr Hans Cloeters and Mr Michael Fox of Friends of Lerderderg, Green Corp[Melton], Mr Richard Piesse (GDTA Track Development Officer), Ballarat Regional Industries Inc [Work for Dole], the CEO's of Moorabool and Hepburn Shires, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, and the State Community Support Fund. Also special thanks are extended to Mr Neil McCracken, Chair of the Lerderderg Track Working Party, and Mr Pat Hope and his team for the enormous workload they took on to see this project through to its successful conclusion.

The Governor then unveiled a plaque which will be installed at the Blackwood Mineral Springs Reserve, and the ceremony concluded with the traditional "cutting of the ribbon" by the Governor. Following a magnificently-catered afternoon tea, the Governor and Steve Moneghetti, led a work along the trail from the Springs to Blackwood township. Most of the people in attendance took part in this walk.

LERDERDERG TRAIL DETAILS

Bacchus Marsh is now the closest point to Melbourne on the GDT, being only a little over 30 minutes away by train, and the entry point to the Trail is at the railway station.
This completes the last link of the GDT as originally planned in the early 1990s. There is now a total of over 260km of walking tracks comprising the GDT, and investigation is proceeding on the feasibility of several further extensions.

The Lerderderg Track starts at the Bacchus Marsh Railway Station and follows an urban route to the Lerderderg State Park boundary at Swans Road, then continues along the west ridge of the Lerderderg Gorge to O'Briens Crossing where the Byres Back Track is joined and followed to Blackwood township. The Track then heads north-westward to Lake Daylesford via the Wombat State Forest, passing Simmons Reef, a once thriving mining settlement, then staying close by the Lerderderg River to Nolan's Camp, the site of a 19th century sawmill.
Beyond this point the trail climbs away from the river, passing the site of the post-World War 2 Balt Camp, then on to the picturesque Jubilee Lake, and finishing at Lake Daylesford, man-made in the 1930s to hide the scars of intensive mining, and now one of Daylesford's beauty spots.
From this hub of the GDT at Daylesford, one is also able to walk 72km to Creswick and Ballarat along the Federation Track, and 115km to Castlemaine and Bendigo via the Dry Diggings and Leanganook Tracks.

There is now an icon 260km linked walking trail which links towns and communities in Central Victoria, and which passes through a great variety of diversified country including substantial gold rush heritage areas.

The GDTA recognises the traditional Koorie custodians of the land through which the Trail passes.

Building of the Lerderderg Track involved the installation of about 200 direction posts, some distance posts, entry station boards containing maps at key locations and a substantial map publication. Some track construction including a substantial number of steps over steep sections was necessary.

The GDTA, continued

THE GDTA

The GDTA is a community-owned ,voluntary organisation which has its base in Daylesford, and whose mission to plan, develop and maintain a linked network of public walking tracks through public land in Central Victoria, and to provide regular walking experiences for its members. The organisation has been in existence for 13 years.

Anyone who is available is encouraged to offer their services and to become a member of the GDTA. Further information about the Association can be obtained from the website http://www.gdt.org.au or by writing to The Great Dividing Trail Association, PO Box 429, Daylesford, 3460.

Contact for this document: Bill Casey GDTA Media Liaison (South) 03 5330 2296 or 0407 347 31903
Email: bill@wtcasey.com

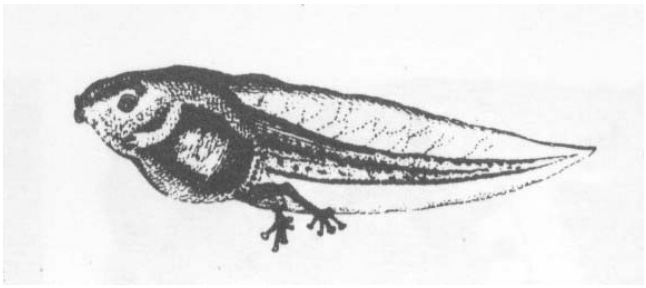
Further information: Dr Barry Golding GDTA President 5327 9733 (W) 03 5345 6343 (H)
Email: barry@cbl.com.au

About the News and Views

At a Council of Stewards meeting in January, that dealt largely with the budget, the role of Editor became a paid position.
This was in response to a proposal and report that I submitted that outlined the reasons why I felt this position needed to be paid. These were, in brief, that the Editor needs to be accountable for his/her work, present a balanced and fair go for various points of view, and finally the role requires approximately 30 hours of work per issue. The DSE agreed to continue to pay for printing and postage costs, while the $4000 per year for the Editor's time will come form the CFM budget, under an Admin and Communications fund.
I recognise that many of you have spent as much or more time than me in your various CFM roles, so I heartily thank you all for the support and encouragement that I have received since taking on this fantastic role 6 issues ago!
A note about letters:
On the whole, the articles and letters submitted to the News and Views have been very constructive and practical. However I need to stress that letters must be 500 words or less. Long letters that are written to denounce the whole process as a complete disaster without offering practical examples or ideas are better printed in your local paper, or written directly to the Minister. Thanks!
Tanya Loos

Bush Notes from Trentham/Blue Mount

This year's unusual weather patterns have resulted in some good recovery opportunities for the local wildlife. The frogs have successfully completed three breeding cycles, thus supplying abundant food for further up the food chain. It has been a bumper breeding year for small birds such as the rose breasted robin, and the superb fairy wrens. They have had two successful nesting cycles in the Blue Mount area. A young kestrel has also been reared successfully.
The increased water flow throughout the Blue Mount / Trentham area has meant that the galaxia fish fingerlings are in abundance in the headwaters of the Coliban, Campaspe, Lerdederg and Loddon rivers, as are the aquatic macrophytes.
The indigenous vegetation along the water courses is recovering well, where weed management has been undertaken.
In the understory of the forest, the dogwoods, black wattle and olearias have been the main new emergents. The forest floor has had an abundance of native daisies, trigger plants and native blue bells which have had a much extended season, as have the toad stools.
Unusual animal activity has accompanied this.



A day before the big rain:
8 young tiger snakes were seen moving uphill in a line; nose to tail at Blue mount. One very over stuffed (with possum) powerful owl was seen flying for cover at 10.00 am along the Domino trail. The white cockatoos squawked night and day for a week before the Tsunami hit the Indian Ocean. Maybe they felt the related earth tremors we experienced here. Even now the gliding possums can be seen nesting in the crooks of trees rather than tucked in their usual holes during the day.

Mary Ann Faulks

What DSE's been up to...

Staff Movements

The Daylesford office is bulging at the seams with five new staff members. We welcome to the Wombat:
Elizabeth Ashman – Senior Natural Resource Management Officer, responsible for the management of the Daylesford Workcentre and forestry activities in the East Midlands District
Shane Leech - Natural Resource Management Officer, currently working on marking and supervision of logging and firewood activities.
Daniel Mudford – Natural Resource Management Officer with a focus on fire management activities
Erin LeLievre – Administration Trainee
Stacey Gowans – Natural Resource Management Officer, forest planning.
Melbourne University forestry students Emma Paulding and Loris Duclos have just concluded six weeks of work experience, during which time they conducted comprehensive assessments of the site values within the Barkstead trackside harvesting areas.
Sadly Darryl Glover has made a permanent shift to Bendigo to work as the coordinator for the Box Ironbark project. Until a replacement is found for Darryl, Tuesday will be coordinating the South West Roading project, with Rebecca stepping into the role of Senior Forest Planner.

Weed Control

Weed control to support fire prevention has been a strong focus of activities over the past two months. Woody weeds such as Gorse, Hawthorn, Broom and Blackberry have been the target, where they are situated along the boundary of townships and private residences. An excavator mounted "groomer" (industrial sized mower) has been used to reduce the height and bulk of infestations in preparation for spraying and/or a prescribed burn. The aim being to reduce the amount of chemical it takes to spray the plants by targeting the regrowth after grooming and also to reduce the fire hazard.Works have been conducted around Daylesford at the Speedway, Victoria Park, Doctors Gully and Connell's Gully. Work is currently being completed around the Townships of Blackwood and Barry's Reef. Further work is planned for gorse infestations at Argus Hill in Daylesford. Where required this work is supported by track maintenance and construction to improve access for both fire fighting vehicles and spraying crews.

Fuel Reduction Burning

Due to the mild weather conditions, the preparation for Autumn Fuel Reduction/Ecological Burning (FRB) is well under way. Crews are busy ensuring that all FRB's planned for autumn are "Ready". FRB's proposed for this autumn were identified in the Fire Operations Plan that was released for comment in August 2004. Preparation includes ensuring a suitable firebreak around the entire perimeter, usually a dozed fire trail or well-constructed hand trail and mapping of natural and built assets.
Once burns are listed as "Ready" then it is a matter of waiting for the right weather conditions. Fuel moisture and weather conditions are critical to ensure that the fire behaviour is suitable to achieve the objectives of the burn and that the burn is conducted in a safe manner with as little impact on the surrounding community as possible.
Burning will be conducted between now and the end of June as suitable conditions permit. All proposed FRB's have been identified with signs attached in prominent places around the perimeter.
Door knocks of surrounding properties will be conducted prior to the ignition of FRB's. If you would like to be notified by phone prior to the ignition of a specific FRB please contact the District Fire Coordinator on: 5367 6573.

Roading

Road maintenance and bridgework has been planned for the late summer autumn period. Autumn provides an ideal time to consolidate road works prior to the damaging winter rains. Where roads are particularly degraded, a bulldozer will be used to reform roads prior to grading. Roadwork is planned for Coopers, Binks, Yankee, Chettle, and Paradise roads over the next two months. Crews have recently rebuilt the bridge at Wombat Station. The bridge on New Sultan Mine road has been scheduled to be replaced with a box culvert similar to the crossing on Wheeler Road. The decking on Loddon River Road, Loddon River Bridge will also be replaced. Other important tasks will involve cleaning drains and culverts.

Wombat Sawlog Supply Plan & Timber Harvesting

So much has happened around timber harvesting arrangements in the Wombat since the last News and Views that we have prepared a separate article to cover the latest events. In brief, the South West Regional Manager approved the amended firewood and trackside harvesting components of the Draft Plan for implementation on 17th January 2005. Harvesting commenced along the Barkstead tracks the following week. Progress was pretty slow for a few weeks due to exceptionally high February rainfall and mechanical breakdowns. At the end of February trackside harvesting had delivered over 450 cubic metres of sawlogs to Dwyers and Boase's mills. DSE expects trackside harvesting to be complete at Barkstead by the second week of March.

Got a question for DSE?

If you wish to speak with Daylesford DSE staff about forest management in the Wombat, we can be contacted by phone on 5348 2211, email on wombat.cfm@dse.vic.gov.au, or visit us at 14 Mineral Water Drive, Daylesford.

Wood Products Working Group Report

The WPWG has been extremely active over the past few months, working collaboratively with a broad cross section of the community, stakeholders, CFM's Council of Stewards, working groups and DSE in helping develop acceptable prescriptions for thinning operations in the Wombat State Forest.
These prescriptions, detailed in the Wombat Sawlog Supply Plan 2005, have included restorative thinning of 'overstocked' forest areas; salvage of wind-thrown, damaged, diseased, dying or dangerous trees that may be in a state of decline and are surplus to habitat requirements; track logging and firewood thinning.

Track logging (I prefer to term this 'verge thinning') has commenced in the Barkstead Block and early evaluation has indicated that this operation has many benefits. Utilising existing tracks and loading bays creates minimal disturbance. Residual produce left behind will be easily accessible for firewood collection at a later date and it may be an appropriate low-intensity operation when wetter conditions prevail.

However, it is obvious that this operation alone will not improve the 'overstocked' areas of forest for a multiplicity of values (ie. holistically) for future generations. Some of these values include biodiversity, recreational amenity, ongoing resource production and preserving cultural heritage traditions and skills. But perhaps the paramount consideration is maintaining and improving the all-important hydrological values. Numerous scientific reports indicate that thinning overstocked forest areas tends to increase water yield.

Responsible and sustainable thinning operations that also enhance forest structure and biodiversity may further benefit water quality. Given the Wombat Forest has around 10 domestic water catchments within its boundaries, forest management must follow clear and unequivocal hydrological imperatives (ie. KPI's - key performance indicators).

Over the past year the WPWG has developed some 'visionary scenarios' as suggested by Dr John Petheram of Melbourne University, and recently presented these as two power-point presentations to the Council of Stewards.
The main objective of this exercise was to find sites in the forest that were perhaps ideal, balancing all values, and then to discuss how past forest management practices had influenced the development of these sites.
The first discussion was on 'Succession', showing some benefits of restorative thinning on overstocked forest sites by analysing various age classes and stocking rates. The photo below shows one ideal example at Musk Creek. Other similar examples were shown from Frankze Track.



Musk Creek forester's reserve, a balanced forest. Large Messmate at 10m spacings (100 trees per hectare)

The second focused on potential 'salvage' of poorer trees from other areas and the reasoning behind utilization of dead, damaged, diseased, dying or wind-thrown trees that may be surplus to habitat requirements.

Five key factors that emerged supporting *salvage* were:

- creating a safer environment for all forest users
- making forest operations more economically viable
- utilisation of poorer trees saves healthy trees being removed to meet sawlog license commitments
- value adding (sawlog vs firewood)
- generally available in sites recently disturbed (post SH1 areas)

Substantial anecdotal evidence exists that firewood collectors remove dead or wind-thrown trees if they are not utilized for their sawlog section. Economically, it is *value-adding* to harvest a sawlog rather than firewood from these areas. However, there are many issues to consider in these operations. Is there adequate habitat existing, both standing and on the ground? If the tree is standing, how long is it expected to remain standing? If the tree is diseased, what are the pros and cons of removal? If the tree is hollow bearing, it is to be retained.

The WPWG has investigated most of the coupes on previous DSE proposed plans to find the ones in most need of *restorative thinning*, *salvage* of poorer trees that may be surplus to habitat, *track logging* or *firewood thinning*. All areas need to be treated on a site-specific basis following initial assessments. There is no single prescription that can be practiced across the entire forest as the patch mosaic is in varying stages of development. A balance of all the above methods may need to be combined to achieve triple bottom line benchmarks.

Wood Products Working Group Report Continued...



Wombat Forest - South Toerag potential salvage. Wind-throw of large exposed Messmate: Utilise for sawlog, firewood or ground habitat? Answer: To be left for ground level habitat. (Both photos taken by G McIntosh 2005)

The WPWG therefore supports DSE's Wombat Sawlog Supply Plan 2005 for trial as it proposes to use an appropriate balance of various methods and sites. The WPWG understands that some *salvage* utilisation from Post-Shelterwood-1 sites may commence shortly following Council of Stewards approval while further assessments of overstocked sites are undertaken.

Thank you to the numerous people, stakeholders, working groups, DSE staff and Council of Stewards who continue to contribute so much to Wombat CFM – truly collaborative forest management.

Quoting from an Interim Stewardship Council press release, "This Council (of Stewards) will have the role of coordinating CFM activities and facilitating community involvement while working collaboratively with DSE' (*ISC media release:* ISC, July 2004).

We have come a long way and learnt a lot from the 1st trial of community involvement in forestry in the Wombat Forest at Lerderderg Coupe in 2002 and at Mudlark in 2003. 'Action and co-learning are crucial elements of successful CFM models' (*Collaborative Forest Management – A review:* Petheram, Stephen and Gilmore, 2002)
Well-done guys.

For copies of the WPWG presentations or any other data collated by the WPWG, please contact the secretary. Cheers.

Gary McIntosh Secretary WPWG PO Box 232
Daylesford Victoria 3460 Ph: 61+ 3 5348 5691
Email: gary.mcintosh@optusnet.com.au

PS. Isn't it great to see some reduced speed limit signs and pictorial 'Wombat' signs around the Wombat Forest now? So many of us have campaigned on this issue for years.

Upper Loddon and Campaspe Catchment Weed Project

DSE and Pest Plant & Animals Working Group are looking to partner with the North Central Catchment Management Authority on an exciting new project looking at enhancing upper catchments within the upper Loddon and Campaspe catchment.

The project is funded by the Victorian Government's Protecting and Repairing Our Water Resources Initiative and will focus on improving the health of the Loddon River, Kangaroo Creek, Sailors Creek and Coliban River over both public and private land.

The project aims to eradicate weeds over 27 kilometres of stream frontage over both public and private land, among other activities. Over the next few months, DSE and PPAWG plan to co-ordinate weed mapping along the Loddon and Campaspe waterways in Wombat State Forest to identify satellite weed infestations.

If you are interested in assisting with weed mapping along waterways, contact Rebecca Pagan, DSE (5348 2211) or Luke Bennett, PPAWG convenor (0419 582 321).

Fauna Snapshot: The Brush-tailed Phascogale or Tuan

Biology and Habitat Requirements
The Tuan is a small, primarily arboreal, carnivorous marsupial. It is a member of the Dasyuridae family which includes Quolls, Dunnarts, Antichinuses, Planigales and the Tasmanian Devil. It is the most arboreal of the dasyurids, possessing long, sharp claws and a gripping hindfoot.

Mating occurs over the early winter months. The males expend so much competitive energy in the period leading up to the mating period, that they all die soon after, at an age of 11-12 months. This occurs in July. Females seldom survive to breed in the second year.

Birth occurs between late June and early August after a 30 day gestation period. It appears that females try to raise as many young as they have teats, eight in Victorian populations. Young Tuans begin to emerge alone from the nest just before they are weaned, at about five months of age. Males disperse over long distances, usually in early summer. Females disperse after mating. It appears that during drought there are smaller litter sizes and populations decreases, possibly by as much as two-thirds and maybe more in severe droughts. Recovery of populations takes at least two years.

Diet consists mainly of large insects, spiders and centipedes, but can eat small vertebrate species or the occasional meal of domestic poultry. Feeding mainly occurs on the trunks and major branches of rough-barked trees and fallen logs. Large smooth barked trees are usually avoided as they are difficult to climb. Dead trees are favoured foraging sites. Ironbark or Box nectar may be taken when these Eucalypts are in flower.

Nests are used during the day for sleeping. Tuans emerge at dusk to feed and may return to nest occasionally during the night. When several animals share a nest they tend to show similar nocturnal activity. Nests tend to be lined with leaves or shredded bark. It is estimated that over a one year period males used 27 different nest sites, while females used 38 nest sites. Except for females with dependant young , animals spent only 2-5 days in a particular nest before moving to a new nest site. Non-breeding nesting sites are in tree hollows in living or dead trees, under flaking bark, tree stumps and fallen logs.

Research indicates that particular nests are used when breeding. These comprised hollows with deep cavities and narrow entrances. Competition with other species for these type of hollows is often intense. At other times the hollows used are less protected from weather and predators. Where tree hollows are scarce, Tuans will use artificial nest boxes for shelter and breeding. Although smaller trees are used, the average tree diameter for trees used as dens is above 80cm in diameter. Research in the Jarrah forests of Western Australia found that the average age of trees used as dens was estimated to be 125-300 years.

Status and Distribution
Listed as Vulnerable under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. Listed as Threatened under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. It is estimated that distribution has declined by 40% since European settlement and may still be decreasing.

There is little detailed information on distribution and abundance in the Wombat Forest and surrounding areas. It has been recorded in the Rocklyn, Shepard's Flat and Spring Hill Forest blocks. It is also recorded at Spargo Creek, south-east of Glenlyon and the Hepburn Regional Park.

Preferred habitat is a dry, lightly treed, open sclerophyll forest on a ridge or hilltop with little or no understorey, on ridges up to 600m in altitude and mainly rough-barked trees. Usually with a few large, hollow bearing trees to act as dens, plus a range of foraging habitats and potential food sources within 500m of a den; but can live in a variety of habitats having reliable rainfall up to 2000mm in rainfall. Has been observed using isolated trees.

Home Range
For an animal of its size the Tuan forages over a very large home range and only small populations can exist in relatively large areas of habitat. Females occupy largely non-overlapping home ranges of 30-60 hectares. The home range for males is over 100 hectares and overlap extensively with females and other males. During the mating season males can travel over ten kilometres to seek out females.

Threats
What are considered to be the major threats to the Tuan are listed below.

- widespread clearing of preferred habitat for agriculture, resulting in habitat loss and fragmentation
- modification of habitat and depletion of tree hollows
- logging and firewood operations
- predation by foxes and cats
- prescribed burns and unplanned fire
- competition for tree hollows from native and exotic species
- mining and prospecting
- drought and climate change

Murray Ralph

A Tuan looks like a very attractive, predominately grey, rat shaped possum with large eyes and a dark luxuriant fluffy tipped tail: Unique!

For a chance to see these adorable and elusive marsupials, why not assist Andy from the Ballarat DSE in monitoring the Tuan population currently residing in the Hepburn Regional Park and surrounds?

4-8 April. Contact Tuesday Phelan at 5348 2211 to book in by 25 March. (1/2 day assistance welcome, too!)

Mountain Biking in Wombat Forest: Forest Sport and Recreation Series


Xavier & Matthew, local lads, focusing on the task ahead.

I will probably be pilloried by some of the mountain biking community for revealing their secret – that Wombat Forest is a relatively undiscovered, highly accessible mountain biking jewel. While most Melbourne based mountain bikers head east or north of Melbourne, those in the know enter the zone. In and around the triangle formed by Woodend, Ballarat and Bendigo is a wealth of great mountain biking terrain and setting to suit all types and levels of cross country mountain biker from novice to die hard racer. Our Wombat Forest is a significant part of that zone.

Who are mountain bikers? Chances are you think in terms of young males ripping around in two wheel packs, storming your favourite walking trails, riding across fragile areas of forest, careering off 5m high cliffs, probably never done an honest day's work in their short lives… Chances are such perceptions didn't arise from the very few and generally well mannered mountain bikers you have seen in the forest.

As a local wine maker discovered recently to his pleasant surprise, they aren't just teens and twenties and it is not a male domain. Riders in the 30s, 40s and 50s, men and women, are well represented. Mountain bike orienteering has regular competitors 60+. And is there really conflict on the trails? From one of the few rigorous studies in mountain biking is this conclusion "Walker opinions are surprisingly positive toward bikes. These opinions are found to be more positive among those walkers who had actual encounters with bikes. By contrast, more negative opinions were found among those who had no such encounters."

As for off trail riding, riders are very conscious of the economic consequences of it. I am talking here of a very direct hit on the pocket. Rear derailleurs (gear system) are a weak point in bikes and are also prone to picking up one of the myriad of sticks off trail. At over $150 a pop for a mid-range derailleur you can understand why off trail is generally no go.

While on the subject of dollars, keen mountain bikers need to have a fair bit of dosh to have their preferred model and a vehicle to transport it. As a community, mountain bikers have money to spend and this is an attribute that is explored in a separate article on Wombat Forest low key tourism opportunities.

Like running, mountain biking comes in many shapes and forms as do the riders. Those who venture off city bike paths and into the countryside in ever increasing numbers (more bikes than cars were sold in Australia in 2004) could be loosely classified thus-

Recreational: 1 hour to day rides on roads and tracks. Move onto forest roads and tracks as their ability allows. Carry minimum gear.

Touring: often a pre-defined route with at least one overnight stay. Carry all gear to camp or use accommodations en route (a format available overseas and increasingly here and NZ). If a commercial tour then the operators will carry gear between accommodations.

Sport: many forms including mountain bike orienteering, other mountain bike navigation including Polaris Challenge which attracts 600+ riders annually, various 12 and 24 hour events on a circuit such as the Kona at Redesdale with 600 riders including yours truly; trials where the riders try and complete an obstacle course without dabbing a foot; enduro events such as the Tasmanian Wildside that goes from the highlands to the coast over a number of stages.

Racing: cross country is the format for the Olympic and Commonwealth games and comprises multiple laps of a technical up and down course; downhill which requires lots of nerve, skill, a strong bike and speed; some variations on those.

Wombat Forest has been host to recreational riders for many years although they are a bit like echidnas – not uncommon but not frequently seen either. Yet I have ridden, run and walked sections of the (mostly) multi-use Great Dividing Trail for over 5 years and have consistently met more riders than walkers.

Sport wise, Wombat Forest has hosted mountain bike orienteering events for over 6 years with some events of the 2004 World Champs recently held near Creswick and Daylesford. In February an enduro bike navigation event used the area between Glenlyon and Bullarto. A spin off from this is a map detailing all navigable tracks in the forest. The first racing cross country circuit in Wombat Forest was established recently south of Woodend. A flowing and challenging race circuit is highly technical to design and labour intensive so you won't see many of those.

How does mountain biking fit with some of our local forest values? Given that it is mainly confined to existing trails then it appears to meet our strong desires for protection of flora. And fauna? From a 2004 article in a UK

Mountain Biking in Wombat Forest, continued

magazine, "A study in the USA found that cyclists and equestrians were the least likely to disturb wildlife, as they both move quietly and reasonably quickly. Walkers were found to have greater impact as they move slower, talk more, and worst of all, are often accompanied by unleashed dogs. But the one user group found to have the greatest environmental impact was birdwatchers. They tend to stay in the same place for lengthy periods, and are therefore regarded by wildlife as potential predators. So mtb'ers aren't always the greatest threat to nature." I couldn't track down this study. But in seeking I did find sufficient research on the impact of humans on wildlife to suggest that mountain bikers probably don't pose any more threat to our fauna than other forest users.
Other highly rated forest values locally were the forest landscape and also recreation areas. Mountain bikers see the whole of the permissible forest as a recreation area. As for landscape values, a recent NZ study of mountain bike rider preferences found that across all skill levels the landscape preferred is native forest/bush.

In summary it appears that mountain biking conforms to key local forest values. There are frequently held perceptions about mountain biking that appear not to stand up to reality. My observations point clearly to increasing mountain biking activity in Wombat Forest. Can we harness this activity for our own ends? Perhaps by showcasing an easily accessible recreation to our local population. Perhaps by looking to adopt a low key form of overseas successes in mountain biking tourism.
Selected web sites: www.mtba.asn.au ; www.imba.com ; www.mountainbike.co.nz
Contributions to this series from other sports and recreations are welcome. I am aware of bush walking, horse riding, trail bike riding, 4WDriving, running, prospecting and no doubt bird watchers will be keen to defend their environmental honour. My concluding contribution in this series will be on a sport and recreation that is as Australian as footy. Rogaining, the all night forest navigation sport.

Ken Dowling, Wheatsheaf

East Timor Visit

Wombat CFM is about to host the Manager for Agro-Forestry from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Mario Godhino. As a part of Victoria's contribution to East Timor, a number of East Timorese have spent time in a number of Government Departments learning skills that will assist this new nation move forward.

At the time of the withdrawal of Indonesia, all Government Records were destroyed. This has meant that issue such as property titles and boundaries have to be totally rebuilt. Three of the four East Timorese visitors will be based in Melbourne for 3 months learning computer based mapping techniques.

Mario will be spending 4 weeks in South Gippsland looking at agro-forestry. He will then be spending a week in Melbourne before basing himself in Bendigo for another month. A part of Mario's itinerary is a week (March 15-18) in our region looking at the Wombat Community Forest Management project, community engagement and to look at the skills and resources that harnessed community engagement can bring. Mario will also be spending a day at the Creswick Landcare Centre and a day at Melbourne University's Creswick Campus. Thursday March 17 is the day planned for Mario to meet the people involved in CFM.

With 60% of the land surface of East Timor sloping at greater than 45 degrees, the challenges of restoring, managing and using the countryside would appear very very challenging.

Tim Anderson

Central Highlands Water and Blackwood Barry's Reef Landcare are happy to invite the community to a discussion on
whole landscape planning.

Guest speakers: **Tim D'Ombraine, Bob Ford and Loris Duclos.**

Saturday April 9th 2-5pm at the Blackwood Hall.
All welcome. Afternoon Tea provided.
Thanks to Central Highlands Water and Moorabool Shire.



Update on Wombat Sawlog Supply Plan

Work in preparing the 2004/05 Wombat Sawlog Supply Plan has taken up a significant proportion of the lives of DSE staff and local community members over the past five months. Much has happened around this project since the last News and Views Edition in November. So….what have we all been doing and where have we got to?

Submissions Review Process

The public comment period for the Draft Plan ended on 13th December 2004 with over 30 submissions received from community members. Submissions covered issues relating to timber harvesting and many other aspects of forest management. The Submissions Reference Group - comprising members of the Council of Stewards – reviewed the submissions and made a number of recommendations to DSE on alterations to the Draft Plan and further information requirements. Their report acknowledged a level of community discomfort around the proposed treatments in mature forest. To enable further discussion around the restorative treatments in mature forest, DSE's South West Regional Manager only approved the implementation of trackside logging and firewood thinning coupes. Copies of the submission response summary, amended treatment and practice guides and a background information paper are publically available.

Trackside Harvesting

Since the partial approval of the Plan, trackside and green firewood harvesting operations have started. Trackside harvesting is a relatively untried treatment; so reviewing and learning is an important part of the process. The objective of the treatment is to provide a supply of sawlog whilst minimising damage to vegetation and soil. The treatment involves the removal of up to 50 percent of sawlog trees within 25 metres of existing tracks. Timber is moved along existing tracks requiring a few new tracks and landings to be created. All hollow trees are retained, along with a minimum of one mature tree every 40 metres each side of the track. Trackside harvesting is primarily intended as a low impact treatment, rather than a restorative treatment as such.

Prior to the commencement of trackside harvesting operations, detailed surveys of sites and roads were collected on a range of environmental and cultural values. Assessment was undertaken on: habitat potential for each site, timber values, forest structure and condition of the waterways (including streams, wetlands and drainage lines). Identification of rare and threatened plants and animals, cultural heritage artefacts, and infestations of weeds, pest animals or disease was also carried out. This data assisted DSE staff to identify special values whilst marking the sites. The data will also be entered into threatened species and weed databases, so it can be useful to other forest management activities.

Community members were invited to inspect the marking of the first trackside harvesting site prior to harvesting starting. Approximately 45 people attended the inspection held on 21st January. A review of the Barkstead trackside harvesting sites will be carried out once operations are completed, and interested community members will be most welcome to participate in this process.

Work towards finalising the 2004/05 Wombat Sawlog Supply Plan

Informal discussions have been held between DSE and CFM working groups to resolve some of the issues around restorative thinning of mature forest. As a result of these discussions, DSE has prepared a series of statistics on vegetation types and age classes in the forest, along with forest stand information for old growth mixed species forests.

Around 40 people attended a field trip on 24th February with Dr Richard Loyn (expert in wildlife management) and Dr Leon Bren (expert in forest hydrology) to discuss the effects of mature forest thinning and shelterwood harvesting on biodiversity and hydrological values. Richard advised that from a biodiversity perspective, harvesting would have the least impact on wildlife values if conducted within post shelterwood one sites as opposed to the remaining mature forest sites. He explained that the fauna living within shelterwood sites are common species, tolerant of disturbance, and that he expected the harvesting to have a very small negative impact on these species.

The Council of Stewards meeting on 28th February adopted Richard's advice, deciding that if sawlog harvesting activities must occur to meet sawlog requirements, they should be focused within post shelterwood one sites for the remainder of the 2004/05 financial year. The council also agreed to the Wood Products Working Group project proposal to fund biodiversity related projects to be undertaken by the Arthur Rylah Institute. During the next few months Arthur Rylah Institute staff will lead the newly formed CFM Coupe Planning subcommittee and DSE planning staff in preparing five harvesting site plans. This project will facilitate the development of coupe planning systems that ensure the best outcomes for biodiversity and hydrological values. A second project proposal from the Wood Products Working Group deals with studying the effects of harvesting on wildlife values. The results of this project will contribute valuable supporting information to decisions regarding future sawlog harvesting in the Wombat State Forest. Discussion needs to take place to develop this project further.

Further work will need to be done to locate suitable shelterwood sites before the Wombat Sawlog Supply Plan is finalised. In the interim DSE will move harvesting operations to the Lousy Creek and South Toerag sites which were part of the Korweinguboora Trial proposal explored with community members in 2004.

Further information about the Wombat Sawlog Supply project is available on the DSE website or by contacting the Daylesford office on 5348 2211.

Tuesday Phelan & Karen Chatto, Daylesford DSE

Field Trip with Dr Richard Loyn: Some Notes on Mudlark...

"Expert open discussion forum on timber harvesting in shelterwood and mature forest sites."
Speakers: Richard Loyn, Chief Ecologist, Arthur Rylah Institute, and Leon Bren, Hydrologist, Melbourne University.

The forum, according to Tim Anderson who facilitated, was "a day where the community and the department and some experts can get together and have a discussion over some options over what is happening in our forest." I was unable to attend, but Tibor kindly lent me a videotape of the event, and I have faithfully (I hope!) transcribed most of the worthwhile, practical and detailed discussions that took place that fine Thursday in the Wombat in late February. Part One will present Richard Loyn's discussion on the pros and cons of thinning at Mudlark, and in next issue, Part Two will present Richard's recommendation to remove sawlogs from Post Shelterwood one coupes, rather than from structurally diverse mixed species mature forest. My apologies to Leon Bren for focussing solely on Richard's comments in this article, and to any of the people quoted here if I missed their comments!

Gayle Osborne: We are not sure what to remove, and what fauna is using the regrowth at the moment. If we take 70% of smaller trees out, what will be disturbed? I know studies so far have shown that there are bush rats, antechinus and ringtail possum with little else. But we did not want to play god and come in and remove it for sawlog necessarily... without expert-biodiversity help – should we thin for bigger trees, or patches?

Richard Loyn: You needn't worry, this is such a young forest, this sort of regrowth is clearly quite common in the Wombat forest. This smaller regrowth is utilised by some birds, and ringtail possums, but the negative impact on these animals would be very minor, and outweighed by the positives. By thinning, you are giving other trees the opportunity to grow faster, and you are creating open spaces. The Scarlet Robin, for example, has probably benefited from opening the area up. That probably would be Scarlet robins through the regrowth, but at a lower density. In terms of what does live here: it is not a rich wildlife habitat in its present form. It would be much richer if the trees were older and more widely spaced. So by thinning, you are heading in the right direction. I will now make some comments on all I can hear (obviously at night I could make comments on mammals).
There are quite a few Spotted Pardalote calling; a canopy feeding insectivore. A couple of White-throated Treecreepers; they nest and roost in hollows. There are probably more hollows here than you might think, although not rich in hollows as there are very few big old trees. There is even a Red-browed Treecreeper here, which is one of the uncommon species of the Wombat Forest, the WF is at the western limit of its range. It's surprising! Because they really do like old trees, I suspect if you walked down there you might find a few old trees. If this was old forest, the Red-browed Treecreeper would be quite common here. So if your aim is to create a good habitat, if the thinning operation is succeeding in making the trees that you site grow faster, then that is a positive. I would be saying quite different things if this was already an old forest, I would be arguing against doing any further manipulation within that ...because old forest within the context of the WF is a rare commodity. I would be saying "leave well alone". But for this – thinning is a good experiment, and Tuesday, you were spot on earlier when you said that it takes a long time to actually be able to see the real benefits. It would be very easy to compare the areas that you have treated with the areas that you haven't. by simple standard bird and mammal surveys.
(Dave Stephenson then asked a question that I couldn't quite hear about doing logging operations in stages)
Richard: A staged approach is more beneficial, both for the regrowth inhabitants and those that like open spaces. Again it would be very easy to make studies to compare different areas. There is not much sign of shrub regeneration here, which is a feature of the Wombat Forest. This is quite different from some of the other forests I have worked in around the state, where after disturbance you tend to get a lot of shrub regeneration.

(Murray Ralph then points out that this is herb-rich foothill forest)

Richard: Yes, this type of forest is a benefit for a group of birds that feed from the ground among trees, scarlet robin, buff-rumped thornbill and in slightly drier forest, Speckled Warbler. These birds are thought to be generally declining in quite a lot of areas. In The WF, which doesn't have a lot of shrubs, the Scarlet Robin and the Buff-rumped Thornbill still seem to be quite common. I'd be saying quite different things about thinning in a shrubbier forest, where what you often get after an operation is this really dense regrowth, excellent for some species of mammals and birds, but for the ones I have been talking about, it's a disaster, it makes poor habitat. In this forest you have got more flexibility because it always seems to retain its structure of openness, a few scattered shrubs here and there, and the species that inhabit shrubs are just not particularly common in the Wombat.

(There was then another question about minimising harm to fauna during operations, from Gayle)

Richard: For every habitat you will wreck, you will create more. There will be Bush Rats living under those branches that presumably were not there until you did the operation. You can't go into a forest with a chainsaw without causing some disruption, and that may sacrifice some habitat here, and more habitat will develop elsewhere. What you have got to do is look at the big picture, and make sure that the habitats you want to provide are provided long term. You have to think broad scale, and you have to think long term, into the future. That is why I really like doing retrospective studies, if you had an area that was thinned 20 years ago, 50 years ago to compare several such areas with areas that have not been thinned; that can give you a lot of the answers that you are looking for...

A big thank you to Richard, Leon, and the staff at DSE for organising this forum, and to Murray, Tibor and Dave for requesting it!
Tanya Loos

The Back Page Interview: introducing the people of CFM

Hi Everyone! This new feature is to help introduce to the community the staff and volunteers of CFM, and also to highlight the diverse range of values and personalities! I interviewed myself for this first segment : I thought you all deserved to know where your editor is coming from… The Questions will be the same each time: so feel free to fill them in yourself and send me in interviews of yourself, or people involved in CFM who you feel need to have a say!!!

Contributions for this section must be 550 words or less, and follow the principles that apply to the whole newsletter; no slander, defamation, totally negative ranting without offering anything constructive etc etc...

Tanya Loos, interviewed by herself.

Where do you live? And where are you from?
Porcupine Ridge, near Hepburn, on a little bush block with my husband, Chris, and two doggies. I was from Preston, Melbourne, and before that Brisbane. And before that: Indonesia, Pakistan, England, Canada. (Dad was in the Oil Industry!)
Occupation?
I spent my twenties doing volunteer work for the ACF, Friends of the Earth, Latrobe Uni Wildlife Reserves, Melbourne DSE (flying foxes), and more recently the Ballarat DSE. At the moment I run the Guildford Post Office with my mum, Evelyn.
Your role(s) in CFM? What does this involve?
I put together the Wombat News and Views, which comes out every two months now. This involves tasks like answering e-mails and phone calls, typing out articles for people, commissioning articles, checking for inconsistencies or missing facts in each issue, attending events/meetings to keep "finger on the pulse", and, of course, layout.
What are the best things about CFM in the Wombat?
I would have to say all the friends I have made, first of all, and then just how much I have learned about forest management and people's values from doing the newsletter , and attending workshops, lectures, forest walks, and many many meetings…
What would improve CFM in the Wombat?
1) to be notified of events earlier so I can organise my work schedule; 2) someone to organise regular walks/ picnics that are centred on fun, and community! Similar to the Stewart's Creek picnics organised by the Biodiversity group, but regularly, and in different choice spots in the Wombat; 3) greater involvement in the south and west of the Forest.

What activity do you do the most in the Wombat Forest?
Walking the dogs, on leashes, while plant spotting, bird watching, scat collecting; all excellent fodder for my Nature Diary, and for nature articles that I write for the Glenlyon local community newsletter.
What is it you most value about the Wombat Forest today? And in the future?
In the Wombat, we have an incredible opportunity to study the effects of various styles of forest management on forest composition and structure; a full scale survey that collates management styles with biodiversity attributes would by very useful indeed. I absolutely adore all the fauna, flora, rocks, soil, water and fungi of the forest! In the future: water, water, water, and firewood.
And finally, this is the controversial question! What is your opinion on the sawlog extraction in the Wombat issue?
I like the permaculture principles of resources being harvested and used locally, and with "a well stocked" and healthy forest this would be easy to do! I vote Green, but I do not believe in the No Logging in Native Forests policy; it is too simplistic, and monoculture plantations are not the whole answer. However, I do think that the Wombat has been overharvested. It is wrong to source logs from elsewhere to fulfil the licensing commitments. Either the licences must be cancelled, and our local mills compensated PROPERLY, if this is possible, or we continue as we are, trying to do a sawlog supply plan that has both ecological outcomes and economic ones… If only we had tried to do things right (triple bottom line/ sustainably) 200 years ago!!!!!!!!

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