

DELWP Future of Our Forests

How can we protect and improve our forests for all Victorians?

This survey is constructed in the way of a popularity contest, rather than a survey to properly inform government priorities and policy. There is no distinction made between forests in the conservation reserve system and multiple use state forests.

To protect and improve the forests, all forests must have active and adaptive management, that recognises Australian ecology has evolved under active Aboriginal management for tens of thousands of years. The current forest ecology and wilderness views are an artifact of 200 years of European neglect, which continues to promote a terra nullius view of the Australian continent.

Traditional Aboriginal use of fire across the broad landscape must be reinstated, if the ground and understorey fuel levels are to be managed. Victoria is currently on track to subject all public native forest to a once in thirty wildfire cycle, which regardless of changing CO2 levels, would not occur if Aboriginal people had continued to manage the forests.

As a symbolic measure, the Reference Areas Act 1978 should be repealed. This Act underpins a principle of forest being "preserved in its natural state" and supports the terra nullius view, rather than active management practiced by Aboriginal people.

The Victorian wildfire record over the past 15 years has confirmed that the supposed "protection" of forests by simply transferring public land from state forest to national park has been a false and misleading political position and a flawed conservation policy position.

Forest fuel management and adequate control of introduced predators and herbivores are essential steps towards genuine protection of the most important forest dependent Victorians, the threatened flora and fauna, that are being decimated in the annual wildfire events.

What benefits do you want future generations to gain or enjoy from Victoria's forests?

Future generations should have reasonable access to the forests for a range of recreational pursuits and supply of forest goods and services such as firewood, honey, timber and paper products. Water supply is an increasingly important output of the forests. Water quality is destroyed for years when wildfires remove all ground cover from ridge lines to riversides. Broad scale regeneration following wildfire, also has significant impacts on water yield.

Following the 2003 wildfires, CSIRO researchers stated that the resulting regeneration would take up all of the water projected to be returned to the Murray River, as a result of Victorian water saving initiatives over the next 20 years. Despite this advice, there has been no management of this regrowth, other than that killed in the 2007 and other wildfires.

Western Australian research has highlighted that increasing catchment water yield by thinning the regrowth costs about 25 percent of the cost of water produced from desalination. Wildlife ecologists have also highlighted the benefits of thinning for species, including birds of prey.

Write your vision inspired by an image below.

When I look at these photos my current vision of the forests is no cultural burning, charred riverbanks burnt heritage bridges and vistas of dead trees. Given current policy and



SouthEastTIMBERassociation

plummeting fuel reduction burning targets I don't see any change, as fire chiefs worry more about owning more water bombing aircraft, than actively managing forest fuel levels.

What are we currently doing well, regarding forest management in Victoria?

None of the above are being managed to a level that will ensure forest sustainability in the medium term (next 20 years).

How do you see your role in future forest management?

Ensuring that the impact of wildfires on biodiversity is highlighted, along with the loss in human lives and assets. Challenge the wilderness myth and the false and misleading impression that forests can be permanently protected just by a change of land tenure. Advocate for independent review of actual conservation and economic outcomes of previous Land Conservation Council and Victorian Environment Assessment Council recommendations. This must be done before the government accepts any more simplistic lock up and neglect recommendations of VEAC in relation to the Central West Investigation.

