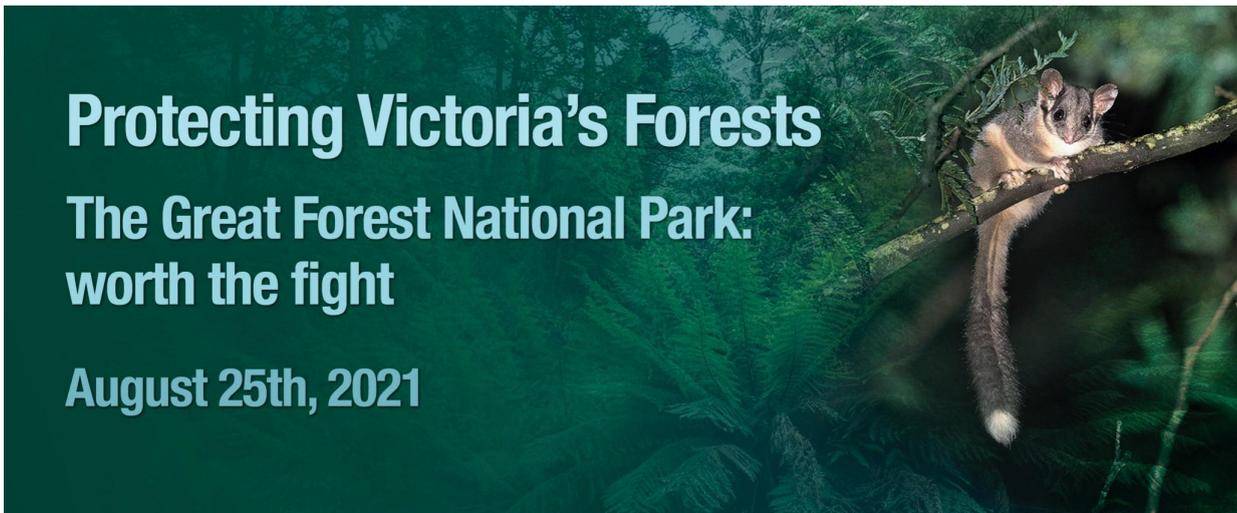


Protecting Victoria's Forests

The Great Forest National Park: worth the fight

August 25th, 2021



Dr Chris Taylor and Sarah Rees

Dr Chris Taylor



[Bio](#) Dr Chris Taylor is a Research Fellow at the Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University. Chris specialises in spatial analysis of forest ecosystems and disturbance regimes, remote sensing, environmental modelling, land use and Forest certification.

Chris has been involved with a number of research projects, ranging from the analysis of fire severity patterns across Australian forests through to climate change adaptation in Australian agriculture. Chris is also a passionate landscape photographer and has held a number of exhibitions of his photography. A list of recent papers can be [found](#) on ResearchGate.

Dr Taylor was lead author on a [recent paper](#) that concluded that forest thinning if anything increased, not decreased fire severity, and contributed to a [paper](#) that detailed effects of logging on four species, where Leadbeaters was particularly affected by the loss of hollow-bearing trees, which are not found in young regrowth stands. Recent research includes [mapping](#) techniques, impacts of [poor management](#), ecosystem [fragmentation](#), critical [analysis](#) of forest reserves, and the impacts of disturbances such as climate change and logging on [water yields](#). His articles in [The Conversation](#) include [logging breaches that threaten our drinking water](#), and one that details how little of a logged forest coupe [actually ends up in buildings or furniture](#) - the vast majority is burnt as initial waste (60%), and of the rest the majority is pulped or chipped leaving only 14% as sawn timber.

Dr Taylor was [a lead author](#) of research that found logging in Victorian forests contributed to the severity of the Black Saturday fires, "reaching the intensity of the nuclear explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki."

Dr Taylor is part of the [Bushfire Recovery Project](#), a collaboration between leading academics and field volunteers, analysing data for practitioners and decision-makers to assist with the development and implementation of post-fire forest policies, plans and management.

Sarah Rees



Sarah Rees is a long term conservationist for the forests and wildlife of Australia, with most of her work focused in the Ash forests of Victoria's Central Highlands. Sarah is the Business Director and a Cofounder of the Great Forest National Park project. Sarah has helped conserve species such as the Baw Baw Frog and Leadbeater's Possum and participates in policy development with community, government and business. Sarah is a Board Director of the Forest Stewardship Council, science facilitator with several large universities, and Committee member for the Office of Conservation Regulator. The Great Forest National Park initiative would conserve much of the Central Highlands and help save the critically endangered Leadbeaters Possum. The proposal gained [a boost](#) with support from Jane Goodall and Sir David Attenborough.

Here is an [engaging article](#) in The Weekend Australian from 2020 on the legal fight against Vic Forests: "In a landmark ruling, the [Federal] court decided VicForests had been logging unlawfully in 26 areas of habitat critical to the two mammals, and planned to log unlawfully in 41 more. Four more groups have filed legal action against the agency and at least 92 logging zones covering about 3575 hectares are now under injunction." The article details the sorry tale of how despite massive losses Victoria is bound by an agreement with Japanese company Nippon to supply a fixed volume until 2030, even though bushfire, logging itself and an increasing number of sightings of Leadbeaters have made this increasingly unviable. In 2019 Vic Forests "earned more than \$11 million in government grants as compensation for not being able to log in a 200m buffer zone around where any possum is found. Since 2014 more than 500 new colonies have been found and there are now 688 buffer zones in place." Sarah Rees is mentioned for an earlier 2011 lawsuit against Vic Forests: "They burgled my house, ran me off the road with my two babies in the back of the car, then ran over my dog. I was abused, had rape threats, death threats, my mail was constantly stolen." However she says community attitudes have shifted - she is more likely to be congratulated now in Healesville for her support for forest conservation.

We note Sarah Rees' status as the "**queen of litigants**" an epithet [bestowed](#) by a Mr Blackwood on the 2 March 2021 in Victorian Parliament, where he suggested that Sarah Rees was "leading the charge for the Great Forest National Park—a proposal deliberately designed to end the native forest timber industry in Victoria". Congratulations Sarah on aiding continued pressure on this industry: "70 per cent of the coupes to be harvested in the Central Highlands are currently unavailable because of third-party litigation by WOTCH". James Merlino's reply on 7th April included "VicForests is responsible for developing and implementing the Timber Release Plan" - not Conservation Regulator's Stakeholder Reference Group or the Conservation Regulator. You can also listen to Sarah on 3RRR's [podcast FIERCE](#) on the fight against logging and deforestation after the Black Summer.

In May this year [Vic Forests'](#) appeal against the Federal Court's judgment in the "Possums' Case" was allowed. The case was brought against VicForests by Friends of Leadbeater's Possum (FLbP). The Federal Court of Appeal found that, despite breaches of Victorian legislation, the logging of native forests under a Regional Forestry Agreement remains exempt from the federal environment law, the EPBC Act. However, the Orders issued are presently stayed as FLbP has lodged an [application for special leave](#) to appeal to the High Court. VicForests filed a response, to which FLbP filed a reply [here](#). A decision as to whether the High Court will grant Special Leave to Appeal is awaited. In spite of VicForests success on one of their many grounds of appeal, they [were ordered](#) to pay [FLbP's costs of the original trial](#) plus 50% of the costs of the appeal, as "FLP was overwhelmingly successful at trial in establishing, as matters of fact, that VicForests contravened State legislative instruments with respect to the endangered Greater Glider and Leadbeater's Possum species. Those factual findings were not disturbed on appeal.

The Leadbeaters Possum continues to decline as its habitat is destroyed, now [estimated](#) to be only 1500 in the wild. Three individuals are conserved at Healesville Sanctuary.

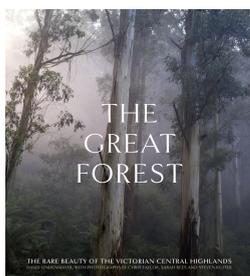
Great Forest National Park



Conservationists worked with researchers and regional communities to create the Great Forest National Park (GFNP) reserve proposal in 2012, supporting key values of the Central Highlands forests – water, wildlife, forest, carbon and National Estate. Support rose to 90% of all Victorians [before the 2014 election](#).

The proposed park [could add](#) 400,000 additional visitors annually, create 750 full-time jobs and add \$70m annually to the local economy - [summary here](#). An [ANU ecosystems report](#) found that the contribution of the Central Highlands to water supply was over \$300m, to agriculture over \$300m, and to tourism over \$260m, over twenty times the value of the timber industry at \$12m.

Sarah Rees [explains](#) more about the GFNP: “a beautiful collaboration for conservation led by community and scientists to protect the critically endangered Mountain Ash forests of the Central Highlands of Victoria. There are more than 30 federal and state listed threatened species in these forests and the region contains 98% of Melbourne’s drinking water.” As favourite places, Sarah mentions the **Cerberean caldera**, a “30 kilometre wide volcanic crater (near Buxton and Marysville) that imploded 370 million years ago and changed the world’s weather patterns, it’s huge. Some of the famous hikes and climbs around this caldera are the Sugarloaf peak trail and Mt Torbrek hike.” She also loves **Mt Erica Gippsland** because, “it has all types of forest in one place; rainforest, old growth Mountain Ash and snow gum on the peak. At night you can hear Yellow-bellied Gliders and Sooty Owls there. There are trails into the forests and up through a magnificent rock formation called Mushroom rocks, a meeting and trade place for aboriginal clans over tens of thousands of years.”



The Great Forest, the rare beauty of the Victorian Highlands featuring stunning photography by Dr Chris Taylor and Sarah Rees, [will be on sale soon](#). “The exquisite photographs reveal the mountain ash forests of central Victoria to be one of Australia’s great natural treasures. The city of Melbourne lies on the edge of a vast plain surrounded by a green and blue mountainous rim, whose hills and peaks are home to the magnificent Mountain Ash, the tallest flowering plant on the planet. The Mountain Ash forests were 20 million years in the making, and deep within the valleys are even more ancient Gondwanic rainforests.”