

Native forests in Victoria - the facts

With threats from ongoing logging and destructive fire management practices, Victoria's native forests need protecting, restoring, and regenerating. Here's why:

To combat climate change

The Mountain Ash forests in Victoria's Central Highlands are the most carbon-dense forests in the world, storing about four times as much carbon per hectare as rainforests in the Amazon. Logging results in at least 94 per cent of a forest's stored carbon ending up in the atmosphere. If we were to stop logging native forests in Australia, the avoided emissions are close to what is needed annually to achieve the 43 per cent emissions-reduction target by 2030.

To protect endangered wildlife

Endangered species such as the Leadbeater's Possum, the Greater Glider and large forest owls reside in Victoria's native forests. Tree hollows that exist only in mature forests are needed as habitat for these animals to survive.

To reduce bushfire risk

Studies show that all forms of logging, including so-called 'salvage' logging and thinning, increase the risk of bushfires. Logging opens up the forest, increasing the amount of fuel on the forest floor and drying the forest out, thus making it more flammable for up to 70 years after it is logged.

To safeguard our water supply

Forests filter and supply Melbourne's water. Past logging in the ash forests has reduced the Thomson Catchment's water yield by 15,000 megalitres each year. In addition, new growth after logging uses large amounts of water, reducing runoff, and leaving less water to be captured for Greater Melbourne's water supply.

To protect our health

Poor air quality from burn-off smoke is harmful to our health. The death rate from respiratory conditions in the Yarra Ranges (where burn-offs occur) is twice that of Melbourne. Stopping both logging and the resulting coupe burns will improve air quality and reduce deaths. Retaining forests also maximises opportunities for Victorians to spend time in nature, invaluable for human mental health and wellbeing.

To enact sensible economics

The economic value of native forests for carbon storage is four times greater than the value of these forests for woodchip and paper production. Creating a Great Forest National Park would generate millions of dollars in additional tourism revenue and create hundreds of new jobs.

To avoid waste

After a Victorian forest is logged, only 4 per cent of the original forest biomass is turned into sawn timber that is used for building houses and furniture. About 60 per cent is left on the forest floor to be burnt or rot. Approximately 36 per cent becomes short-lived products such as paper, cardboard, and pallets, most of which (around 85 per cent) end up in landfill.

To respect the wishes of most Victorians

In 2019, Elders and Traditional Owners wrote to Premier Andrews and the CEO of VicForests to "demand an immediate stop on logging our Country". Surveys show that nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of Victorians support the ending of native forest logging. In inner Melbourne the opposition rises to over 90 per cent. 86 per cent of Victorians support the development of national parks and conservation reserves across both land and sea.

Steps for a better future

We call on the Victorian government to:

End all logging and destruction of native forests and abolish VicForests

Ensure all forms of native forest logging, including salvage logging of fire-impacted and storm-damaged forests, ends in 2024. Regulations that encourage ongoing logging, such as the Timber Utilisation Plan, should be amended. And legislation that enables forest destruction, including the Wood Pulp Agreement Act, the Regional Forest Agreements, and anti-protest laws, should be overturned.

Immediately enact the Victorian Forest Plan for industry transition

Ensure that the Victorian Forest Plan is enacted in full, including industry transition and support for businesses and communities. This includes diverting a proportion of commercial timber plantations from export to support local industry, thus ensuring sustainable production of high-grade timber products. Many retraining and work opportunities exist in replanting programs for logged areas. Examples include addressing soil erosion, protecting water catchments, and monitoring the health of our forests.

Establish reserves and national parks, with First Nations communities' voices at the forefront of decision-making processes

Work with the Australian Government to establish the proposed Great Forest National Park, thereby protecting and expanding the habitat of many endangered species and linking isolated forest reserves. Bring forward and prioritise the formation of three new national parks: Lerderberg-Wombat, Pyrenees, and Mount Buangor.

Promote tourism and green jobs

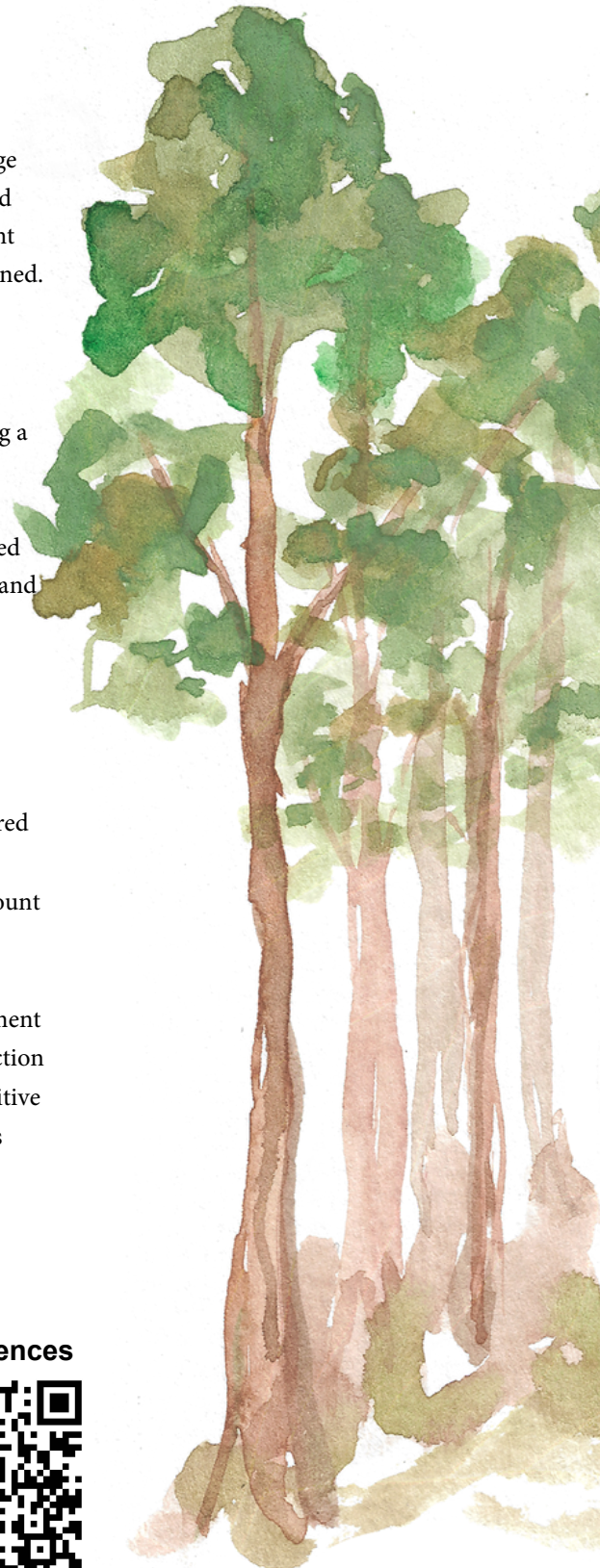
Better fund and promote tourism, education, cultural awareness, and management relating to Victoria's parks, including funding for jobs in environmental protection and forest restoration in collaboration with First Nations peoples. Support positive alternatives such as small-scale farm forestry, and sustainable social enterprises such as the CERES Fair Wood scheme.

Key references:

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