

Timber harvesting in Mt Cole State Forest

September 2013

History

Mt Cole State forest has a history of timber harvesting going back to the 1800s. All of the forests present today are regrowth following harvesting over the past 150 years.

While there has been little harvesting over the past decade DEPI has recently reviewed sustainable harvesting rates and is now in a position to support a small scale local industry based on areas zoned for timber production in State forest.

Benefits of a local industry

By harvesting and regenerating a small area of forest each year the community will benefit from locally sourced and value-added timber products worth upwards of \$500,000 annually, a sustainable supply of firewood for heating homes, ongoing jobs in harvesting, hauling and processing timber along with flow-on benefits to the local economy.

Harvesting and regeneration will also contribute to the maintenance of a healthy and diverse forest that stores carbon, protects water quality, supports wildlife, and provides a range of visitor opportunities.

An ongoing timber industry presence in the Mt Cole forest will also assist with fire protection and forest stewardship

Timber harvesting

DEPI has recently reviewed sustainable harvest rates for State forests in Western Victoria. In the Mt Cole State forest an annual level of 1500 m³ of sawlogs has been adopted. Firewood will also be produced as a by-product of sawlog harvesting operations.

DEPI has decided to make 1000m³ of sawlogs available from these forests for an initial period of 3 years and is currently seeking proposals from the timber industry for access to this timber.

A draft Wood Utilisation Plan (WUP) indicating areas to be harvested has also been produced. Copies of the Request for Proposals or the WUP can be obtained by sending an email to woodutilisation.plan@depi.vic.gov.au.

Clear felling (with retained seed trees) followed by a hot regeneration burn will be used at Mt Cole. Past experience has proven this technique to be the most effective way to create a seedbed and regenerate the forest after harvesting.

It is also considered the best means of limiting the spread of the naturally occurring *Armillaria* fungus which can cause patches of forest dieback.

Of the 12,000 ha of forest in the Mt Cole area approximately 4,000 ha is State forest suitable for sawlog harvesting. Around 20ha of this area (0.5%) will be harvested and regenerated each year to supply the volumes indicated.

Protection of forest values

The forests at Mt Cole have a range of values including rare vegetation classes, significant fauna such as Powerful Owls, threatened plant species, and both indigenous and post settlement sites of cultural importance.

Many of these values are protected in the extensive system of reserves which covers almost 50 per cent of the Mt Cole area.

Where these values occur in forest zoned for timber production specific guidelines apply to ensure that they are protected from timber harvesting operations.

This may include field inspections by DEPI biologists or cultural heritage specialists, modification of coupe plans to protect sensitive sites, or altering the timing of harvesting to prevent disturbance to breeding of key fauna species.

All timber harvesting must be conducted according to the Victorian Code of Practice for Timber Production which ensures, among other things, that water quality is protected and the forests are properly regenerated following harvesting.

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