

FORESTRY

FORESTS OF VICTORIA

Introduction

Forests are complex and dynamic ecosystems of living organisms and their physical habitat. The living organisms include plants, animals, birds, fungi, and a vast collection of micro flora and fauna. The physical components of the ecosystem include those associated with the atmosphere, the soils, and the rock formations from which the soils have been derived. The objectives of forest management vary according to the demand for the benefits that a forest ecosystem can provide and the capability of the ecosystem to supply the desired benefits without detriment to its long-term productive capacity. Forests owned by the community, such as the State forests of Victoria, provide a wide range of benefits both tangible and intangible. The efficient management of forest ecosystems to produce these benefits is a demanding task involving considerable resources of skilled manpower, finance, and equipment. The services of a wide range of expert personnel are required including foresters, botanists, zoologists, pathologists, entomologists, hydrologists, engineers, surveyors, management specialists, economists, sociologists, landscape architects, and administrators.

Approximately 35 per cent of the total land area of Victoria is occupied by forests. This represents an area of 7.93 million hectares of which 6.74 million hectares are State forest being managed by the Forests Commission, Victoria. 2.29 million hectares of the State forest are classified as reserved forests, while the remaining 4.45 million hectares are protected forests. The reserved forests are permanently reserved as forest land and can be excised or alienated only in exchange for other areas of Crown or private land. The protected forests are not permanently reserved although the Forests Commission is responsible for their management.

The major belt of forest in Victoria is located in the eastern half of the State extending from a point to the north of Melbourne to the New South Wales border. This area forms the southern end of the vast and continuous belt of forest that straddles the Great Dividing Range along the length of the east coast of Australia. Other extensive areas of forest in Victoria are found to the north-west of Melbourne, in the South Gippsland Ranges, the Otway Ranges, the south-western region, the Mallee, and the northern and central parts of Victoria where forests of red gum, ironbark, and box are present.

Types

The forests of Victoria embrace many types varying from the tallest of hardwood forests in the world, which occupy the cool mountain regions in the east, to the stunted mallee heathlands of the arid north-west. The main forest types recognised within State forests are mountain forests, stringybark forests, red gum forests, ironbark and box forests, arid woodlands, arid heathlands, and forest

plantations. The majority of native forests are hardwoods, while most forest plantations are of softwood species.

Mountain forests

The mountain forests occupy about 760,500 hectares of the cool, high rainfall country in the Central and Eastern Highlands, the South Gippsland Ranges, and the Otway Ranges. The forests are of two main types, namely, sub-alpine woodland, and ash forests of alpine ash, mountain ash, and shining gum.

The sub-alpine woodland occupies the highest elevations in the State ranging from approximately 1,400 metres to 1,800 metres. It covers about 110,500 hectares in Victoria and typically consists of snow gum forests interspersed with snow grass and herb plains. Because they occupy an area where the climate is severe, sub-alpine woodlands must be carefully managed to ensure protection of vegetation and soils.

The sub-alpine woodland yields large quantities of water which is used for domestic, irrigation, and hydro-electric purposes. It also provides an environment suitable for specialised recreational use, including intensively developed ski resorts, scenic roads, and walking tracks. The new alpine walking track, which is planned to extend along the total length of the Great Dividing Range, passes through sub-alpine woodland for a considerable portion of its length.

The ash forests of alpine ash, mountain ash, and shining gum extend from the lower limits of the sub-alpine woodland down to elevations of approximately 600 metres, or lower on some southern aspects. They occupy the cool, moist regions to the east of Melbourne and in the South Gippsland and Otway Ranges, and cover a total area of approximately 650,000 hectares of which 280,000 hectares are reserved forests and 320,000 hectares are protected forests.

The mountain forests play an important role in Victoria's economy as they are among the most productive forests in the State, yielding large quantities of wood and water, and providing an environment for recreational activities. They produce large volumes of timber of seasoning quality, and the majority of the hardwood pulpwood used by the papermaking industry in Victoria. They occupy significant portions of the catchment areas used to supply water to major population centres. The very tall trees and dense understorey of shrubs and ferns found in ash forests provide magnificent scenery, and afford an excellent habitat for well-known wildlife species, such as lyrebirds, possums, and wallabies.

Stringybark forests

The stringybark forests of Victoria include a wide variety of forest types in which various stringybark eucalypts and associated species occur. They are the most extensive of the Victorian forest types and occupy practically all of the forest land on the coastal plains, and in the foothills to the north and south of the Great Dividing Range up to elevations of 900 metres. The total area of stringybark forests is 4.57 million hectares of which 1.50 million hectares are reserved forests and 2.51 million hectares are protected forests.

Fire plays an important role in the ecology of the stringybark forests. These forests are of a dry sclerophyllous nature and because of long dry summers they are among the most fire prone forests in the world. They produce large quantities of bark, branchwood, and other litter which accumulates on the forest floor and forms a highly inflammable fuel during the dry summer months. Fires from natural causes, such as lightning, have always been a feature of the stringybark forests. However, the number and intensity of the fires occurring appears to have increased since European settlement, and major wildfires have often had disastrous effects on the forest and the surrounding rural areas. The need to reduce the hazard of an extreme wildfire in the stringybark forests has led to the development of a practical technique for

controlled burning of these forests. The technique involves the use of controlled fires during cool weather to remove a portion of the litter that accumulates on the forest floor. The application of controlled burning is carefully planned to reduce the danger of wildfire at strategic locations, and to maintain a pattern of different conditions through the forest which will provide a variety of natural habitats for flora and fauna. Large numbers of separate controlled fires are employed to achieve this effect.

The presence of the root-rot fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi* (Rands) in the stringybark forests is currently causing concern. Sections of the coastal silvertop forest in eastern Gippsland and other stringybark forests in south-west Victoria have been damaged, and in some cases killed by the fungus. A detailed research programme is currently in progress, and in the meantime controls have been imposed to restrict the spread of the fungus through transfer of soil by trucks and tractors.

The stringybark forests provide wood, water, and recreation. They yield some 65 per cent of the total volume of timber produced from State forests with the principal uses of the timber being house framing, general construction, and wood pulp for hardboards, paper, and packaging material. A large portion of the total yield is now coming from the extensive forests of eastern Gippsland. Some areas of intensively managed stringybark forest in the central part of Victoria have been producing regular timber yields for up to 80 years. In western Victoria, where they are practically the only reserves of original native vegetation, they are an important source of timber for farm buildings, fencing, and fuel.

Stringybark forests occupy the water catchments of many cities and towns in Victoria. They are rich in birds, animals, and wildflowers, and their distinctive character makes them an attractive place for recreational pursuits. They attract large numbers of day visitors throughout the year, and are frequently used for fishing, camping, and hiking, especially during the early summer and autumn.

Red gum forests

The red gum forests are the most widely distributed of the Victorian forest types although their total area is relatively small. Extensive areas of river red gum can be found along the flood plains of the Murray River downstream from Cobram, and along the northern reaches of its tributaries. Savannah woodlands of red gum occur on the western plains and the species is common along watercourses throughout most of Victoria.

The red gum forests produce substantial quantities of wood and are widely used for recreational pursuits. In addition they play an important role in the control of water flows along the Murray River system and its tributaries. The forests have supported a viable timber industry since the earliest days of settlement. Red gum timber is used for sawmilling, sleepers, posts and piles, and because of its strength, durability, and attractive appearance it is keenly sought.

The open woodland and gentle slopes of the red gum forests are well suited for outdoor recreation. Roads and tracks are inexpensive to construct and there are many good sites for camps and picnics. Streams and billabongs are focal points for recreation and the numerous species of birds and animals associated with the water are strong attractions. The red gum forests also provide an excellent grazing area for domestic stock and native animals.

Ironbark and box forests

The major areas of ironbark and box forests occur on poor soils in the north-central regions of Victoria where low rainfall and hot dry summers are characteristic of the climate. The main forests are mixtures of red ironbark and box eucalypts with the species mixture generally being determined by the fertility and water holding capacity of the soil. The ironbark and box forests are used for

fencing timbers and fuel, and they are highly valued for honey production and recreation.

Arid woodlands and heathlands

The arid woodlands and heathlands occupy large areas of the Murray Basin plain in the north-west of Victoria. They are forests of tremendous diversity with a wealth of plant species and many distinct associations. The diversity of these ecosystems is mainly due to variations in soil type, and the past history of the areas they occupy. The arid woodlands and heathlands offer environments suitable for recreation and they are of considerable scientific and aesthetic interest. However, because they occupy low rainfall areas, and are of a stunted form, they are of relatively minor value for water and wood production.

Forest plantations

The lack of native species suitable for the commercial production of softwood and the presence of derelict farmland have led to the development of extensive forest plantations in Victoria. The total area of these plantations (including privately owned plantations) now exceeds 100,000 hectares, with more than half of the area being established since 1960. Early planting trials covering a wide range of softwood species indicated that radiata pine was eminently suited to the medium rainfall environments of Victoria, and it has been used in the majority of plantations. Small areas of Corsican pine, maritime pine, ponderosa pine, and Douglas fir have also been established. Mountain ash is the only native species that has been used on any scale for plantation purposes.

The prime use of forest plantations is for wood production, but they also provide valuable cover for water catchments, and recreational benefits, such as those obtained from driving, picnics, and general scenic enjoyment. Another benefit from plantation development has been the reforestation of abandoned farmlands.

Further reference, 1972

Benefits derived from forests

The benefits provided by the State forests of Victoria include wood, water, recreation, minor vegetative products, honey, and scientific and aesthetic values. Of these, wood products are the only benefit for which accurate records are kept. Information is also available on some aspects of water production and recreation, but no quantitative information is available on the wide range of intangible benefits that are derived from the forests, such as those associated with scientific and aesthetic values, atmospheric purification, and the subjective experiences obtained from recreation.

Wood

Statistics indicate that the output of wood products from Victorian forests increased in 1973-74 to 2,667,000 cubic metres. Of this total 2,409,000 cubic metres were logs for sawing, peeling, slicing, or pulping, and the wood used as firewood or hewn timber totalled 268,000 cubic metres. During 1973-74 there was a continuation of the trend towards amalgamation of sawmills into larger more efficient units. In addition, the use of waste wood from sawmills for pulp and paper production continued to increase. The following table summarises the production of wood, for all species, from Victorian forests (including privately owned lands) for the years 1969-70 to 1973-74:

VICTORIA—PRODUCTION OF WOOD FROM FORESTS
(’000 cubic metres)

Item	1969-70	1970-71	1971-72	1972-73	1973-74
Logs for sawing, peeling, slicing, or pulping—					
Hardwoods	1,883	1,940	1,854	1,701	1,814
Softwoods (plantation grown pines)	469	473	586	689	595
Total logs	2,352	2,413	2,440	2,390	2,409
Hewn and other timber (not included above): estimated volume—					
Firewood (a)	279	263	254	187	165
Other (b)	119	112	116	118	103

(a) Excludes mill waste used as firewood.

(b) Includes telephone and electric supply transmission poles, bridge and wharf piles and beams, fencing timbers, railway sleepers, and mining timbers from Crown lands. Similar information for private lands is not available.

Recreation

The demand for recreational benefits from Victoria's State forests is of major proportions and growing rapidly. This large and increasing demand is attributed to the increasing urbanisation and mobility of the population, as well as a growth in the resources of time and money available for recreational activities. In addition, the conservation movement has led to an increase in awareness of the importance of forests for recreation and educational purposes. As a result, schools, scientific societies, clubs, and naturalists are now making wide use of forests for studies in geography and the ecology of plant and animal communities.

Recent surveys have shown that people make more than three million visits per annum to the more popular areas of State forest, and this recreational use is estimated to be increasing at a rate of 10 to 20 per cent per annum. The table below shows the numbers and main activities of visitors to some selected State forests in Victoria during 1972 :

VICTORIA—NUMBER AND MAIN ACTIVITIES OF VISITORS
TO SELECTED STATE FORESTS, 1972

Forest	Main activities	Number of visitors
You Yangs	Drives, picnics	82,000
Mt Macedon	Drives, picnics	82,000
Mt Disappointment	Drives, picnics	24,000
Grampians	Drives, picnics, camping, and hiking	150,000
Mt Buller	Skiing and other snow sports	140,000
Mt Baw Baw	Skiing	30,000

The Forests Commission has established a special Environment and Recreation Branch to plan and co-ordinate development of State forests to meet the upsurge in demand for recreation. Important projects recently undertaken include extension of the alpine walking track and construction of interpretative nature trails in several forest parks. During 1973-74 a total of seven new forest parks and reserves were set aside as areas where recreation was the prime objective of management. The number of such areas within State forest at 30 June 1974 was 113, covering a total area of 56,360 hectares.

The State forests of Victoria offer a wide range of recreational environments. An illustration of their potential is provided by a recent survey by the Forests Commission, Victoria, that listed the resources and facilities in State forests, and adjoining roads and streams, that are available for recreational purposes. The results of the survey are contained in the following table :

VICTORIA—STATE FOREST RECREATION RESOURCES, 1972

Resource	Quantity
Picnic grounds	791
Walking tracks	670 km
Camping grounds	346
Roads suitable for pleasure driving	5,600 km
Roads suitable for trail bikes and four-wheel drive vehicles	18,400 km
Beaches suitable for swimming	92 km
Water suitable for boating	18,200 ha
Streams suitable for canoeing	1,300 km
Streams and shore suitable for fishing	6,900 km
Land and water suitable for hunting and shooting	1,510,000 ha
Land suitable for bush hiking, orienteering, etc.	3,397,000 ha
Ski resorts and snow locations	4

Water

It is estimated that water catchments in State forests yield more than 50 per cent of the total surface water run-off in Victoria. These catchments provide water for irrigation and hydro-electric purposes and for domestic use by towns and cities throughout rural areas. State forests are obviously of considerable importance for water production although no records are available on the volume or value of the water produced. However, an indication of their importance is given by the fact that during 1973–74 the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission supplied 1.7 million megalitres of water for irrigation purposes, a major portion of which came from catchments within State forests.

Further reference, 1975**Management**

The State forests of Victoria are managed by the Forests Commission under the *Forests Act* 1958. This Act provides for State forests to be managed to produce a sustained yield of wood, and to provide protection for water catchments, recreational and educational opportunities for people, a habitat suitable for native flora and fauna, and a range of minor forest products such as forage for grazing, honey, essential oils, gravel, and stone. The Forests Commission also has explicit responsibilities under the Act to protect State forests from misuse and damage by fire, insects, and fungi.

In order to fulfil its obligations under the Act the Commission is organised into functional and territorial divisions. The functional divisions cover administration, forest management, forest operations, economics and marketing, forest protection, and forestry education and research. Territorial organisation is based on seven field divisions each of which is subdivided into a number of forest districts. The forest district is the basic territorial unit through which management of State forests is implemented. There are a total of 48 districts in Victoria, each of which is under the control of a professional forester.

The Forests Commission is a large and diverse organisation. During 1973–74 it employed a total of 1,695 persons in a wide variety of occupations and its total expenditure was \$14.5m. Management activities undertaken in 1973–74 were extensive and a brief description of some areas of activity follows.

Establishment and tending of forest plantations

The establishment of plantations to meet future requirements for wood and to reforest derelict areas of farmland continued on a major scale in 1973–74. A total of 580 hectares of native hardwood plantations was established during the year, the main planting being mountain species in the Eastern Strzelecki Ranges of South Gippsland. During the year a total of 5,430 hectares of new softwood plantations was established, almost the whole area of which was radiata pine. Softwood plantings were again concentrated in each of eight development zones, where it is planned to establish an area of plantation sufficient to support large and integrated wood-using industries.

The establishment of softwood plantations on a major scale in Victoria has many beneficial effects including provision of much needed timber supplies, an environment suitable for picnics, pleasure drives, scenery, etc., and reforestation of derelict farmland. However, the establishment of new plantations may involve major environmental changes, and before a plantation is established a considerable amount of research and planning is carried out to minimise undesirable effects. Where a new plantation is to be established within an area of native forest an ecological survey is made, and the plantings are located so as to minimise their influence on the environment. Types of native forest that are limited in extent, or are of special ecological significance, are excluded from the planting area. In addition, substantial blocks and corridors of the original vegetation are retained to provide undisturbed habitats for native flora and fauna.

VICTORIA—STATE FOREST SOFTWOOD
PLANTATIONS : ESTABLISHMENT AND
TENDING ACTIVITIES

Activity	Area	
	1972-73	1973-74
	hectares	hectares
New planting	5,200	5,430
Re-planting felled areas	350	300
Thinning—commercial	1,050	1,050
—non-commercial	70	10
Pruning	430	220
Fertilisation	2,170	870
Firming	390	330
Cleaning—ground	7,350	3,950
—aerial	2,800	3,820

Regeneration and tending of native forests

The regeneration and tending of native forests is aimed at maintaining them in a healthy, productive condition so that they can continue to supply benefits to the community in perpetuity.

During 1973-74 a total of 14,035 hectares of native forest was subjected to regeneration or other silvicultural treatment. This area was smaller than in the two preceding years because of the withdrawal of labour previously available under rural relief schemes.

VICTORIA—TREATMENT OF NATIVE FOREST TYPES IN STATE
FORESTS, 1973-74

Treatment	Forest type (area treated in hectares)					Total
	Ash forest	Stringy-bark gum	Box iron-bark	Red gum	Native pine	
Aerial seeding	958	282	..	..	..	1,240
Hand seeding	308	244	..	6	..	558
Induced seed fall (a)	285	2,279	..	..	..	2,564
Regeneration felling/natural seed fall	140	1,001	67	..	..	1,208
Liberation felling	129	4,298	41	65	8	4,541
Thinning	182	464	1,944	306	36	2,932
Coppicing	..	32	824	53	..	909
Other	..	18	65	..	..	83
Total	2,002	8,618	2, 941	430	44	14,035

(a) Artificially induced seed fall from standing trees.

Forest protection

Protection of State forests from damaging agencies, especially wildfire, is a most important management task. The term wildfire applies to uncontrolled forest fires. Strong northerly winds with high temperatures and low relative

humidities during the dry summer period create conditions favourable to the rapid spread of wildfire in Victoria. The Forests Commission is responsible for prevention and suppression of wildfires in all State forests and national parks, and in most alienated land within 1.5 kilometres of State forest or national park boundaries. Legislation provides strict control over the lighting of fires, and the power to prohibit the use of fire, and to close down certain forest operations during periods of extreme fire danger. Considerations of fire protection are important in most forest operations, in the training and deployment of staff and labour, and in formulation of regulations concerning the use of forest.

The use of aircraft on fire protection and suppression activities is now well established. Helicopter landing points are maintained at selected locations in remote mountain areas where access by ground is slow and difficult. In addition a number of landing strips have been constructed in forest areas with facilities for preparing and loading fire retardant chemicals for aerial bombing of remote fires. The Forests Commission maintains and uses an extensive radio communications network for fire protection and other activities. This network is currently being converted to VHF equipment.

The fire danger during 1973-74 was relatively low over the whole of Victoria because of general summer rains. During the season, Forests Commission personnel attended 211 wildfires, 76 per cent of which were brought under control before they reached an area of 4.05 hectares. These fires burnt a total of 18,210 hectares of State forest and national parks. The area of State forest and national parks burnt in the five fire seasons up to and including 1973-74 is contained in the following table:

**VICTORIA—AREAS OF STATE FOREST AND
NATIONAL PARK BURNT BY WILDFIRES**
(hectares)

Year	Commercial area	Non- commercial area	Total
1969-70	1,380	3,710	5,090
1970-71	610	4,200	4,810
1971-72	4,040	13,180	17,220
1972-73	31,010	60,500	91,510
1973-74	6,310	11,900	18,210

The wildfires occurring in the State forests originated from a variety of sources. Of the total number of outbreaks, 18 per cent were attributed to landholders and householders, lightning caused 11 per cent, and deliberate lighting accounted for 26 per cent. The causes of fires attended by Forests Commission personnel for the years 1969-70 to 1973-74 follow:

VICTORIA—CAUSES OF FOREST WILDFIRES

Cause	Number of fires				
	1969-70	1970-71	1971-72	1972-73	1973-74
Grazing interests	1	2	1	5	..
Landowners, householders, etc.	49	87	56	148	37
Deliberate lighting	43	48	56	75	54
Sportsmen, campers, and tourists	37	45	34	68	23
Licenseses and forest workers	14	20	15	13	11
Smokers	27	11	12	23	6
Lightning	37	59	95	100	24
Tractors, cars, trucks, locomotives, and stationary engines	15	20	11	21	12
Children	13	12	8	18	8
Sawmills	6	4	3	12	6
Miscellaneous known causes	22	22	21	40	15
Unknown origin	40	28	13	47	15
Total	304	358	325	570	211

Fire lookout towers at 95 locations were manned during the summer period and aircraft were used to patrol some forest areas after periods of lightning activity. In accordance with established practice a helicopter was retained on contract and used for fire detection and suppression activities.

During the year a helicopter was used for aerial spraying of 490 hectares of high grade mountain ash forests to control defoliation by phasmatids. Biological control of the sirex wasp was continued with the release of parasites in areas of known infestation. The root-rot fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi* continued to cause concern, although the fungus does not appear to have spread significantly from infected sites in East Gippsland. In an attempt to limit spread of the fungus, regulations were introduced requiring all tracked vehicles to be washed free of soil before entering disease free zones.

Fire protection, 1965

Research and development

The Forests Commission maintains an extensive research and development programme covering a range of its functions, including fire protection and suppression, forest ecology, forest management, and the provision of opportunities for recreation in forest environments. This research and development programme plays a vital role in Forests Commission activities by providing information on which to base management decisions aimed at meeting the changing needs of the community.

Studies of the behaviour of forest fires under various weather conditions are contributing to improvements in the strategies and methods of fire fighting. They also enable more efficient use of controlled fires for fuel reduction, habitat management, and silvicultural purposes. During the year, studies were initiated to develop new techniques for classifying forest fuels into composition and flammability types, and the role of long-term fire retardants was further investigated. A study of the short-term effects of fire on foothill eucalypt forests was concluded. The studies indicated that the forests were adapted to a wide range of fire intensities, but that the frequency of fire may be critical.

Research into the silviculture of both native hardwood and exotic softwood forests is continuing. The major areas currently being investigated cover nursery practice, crop establishment, and tending practices such as fertilisation and thinning. During the year a major study was commenced which aimed at comparing the productivity of first and subsequent rotations of *Pinus radiata* on representative sites at Rennick and Myrtleford. Investigations continued into the productivity of intensively managed eucalypt forest controlled on short rotations.

An extensive research programme into the genetics of both hardwoods and softwoods is being maintained. The benefits of earlier research in this field are now apparent with increasing yields of superior radiata pine seed from the Korweinguboora seed orchard.

Research in entomology is concentrated on the leaf-eating phasmatid insects and the sirex wood wasp. In both cases research has led to the development of techniques that are assisting in field control of these insect pests. Studies in phytopathology are concerned mainly with evaluation of the threat to native eucalypt forests posed by the root-rot fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

Mensuration and management studies include projects covering the development and use of models to simulate the growth and harvesting of forests, and to assist in planning the harvesting activities within a forest. The use of State forests for recreation is currently the subject of a major survey designed to assess the nature and intensity of such use, its seasonal variations, and the socio-economic backgrounds and origins of visitors.

A major study of the ecology of *Pinus radiata* plantations in north-east Victoria was continued. The aim of this long-term project is to examine plantations as habitats for macroscopic flora and fauna, including mammals,

birds, and insects. Changes in species and population density that occur following establishment of a plantation are being recorded, and the influence of native vegetation in and around a plantation is being investigated.

Studies were continued into various aspects of forest hydrology. A multiple catchment study aimed at investigating the effect of plantation clearing on storm-run-off was continued in north-east Victoria. Water quality measurements were maintained for a number of areas throughout Victoria.

Conclusion

The forests of Victoria are an important natural resource which make a major contribution to the environment and welfare of the community. Forested catchments provide large quantities of water without which cities, towns, industry, and agriculture could not exist. The trees produce a supply of wood, which is a primary raw material for the development and maintenance of our society, and the forests themselves constitute a habitat in which native flora and fauna can be conserved for the purposes of study and enjoyment by future generations. They supply a wide variety of excellent recreational opportunities that are both popular and necessary with the increasing urbanisation of the population. In addition they provide a variety of other products and intangible benefits for various sections of the community.

Perhaps the most important and distinctive feature of Victoria's State forests is that they constitute a renewable natural resource, which with efficient management will continue to provide major benefits for future generations.

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