



MEDIA RELEASE

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Timber industry regroups to consider forest salvage plan

VicForests is this week meeting with contractors and sawmillers in Gippsland and northeast Victoria, to assess the impacts of this summer's fires and to outline plans for salvage of timber from the State's public forest estate.

Salvage harvesting has already commenced in some parts of West Gippsland, in coupes previously available as part of the normal government approvals process.

Approximately 670,000 hectares of Victorian State forest has been burnt in the 2006/07 fires. This includes about 70,000 hectares of mature forest, much of which was scheduled for harvesting and processing by Victoria's high value native forest timber industry over the next 20 years.

Initial estimates are that as much as 2,000,000 cubic metres of high quality ash has been affected by the fires.

The objective of the salvage program is to recover high value timber for existing domestic processors. Initial assessments indicate that the salvage will take in less than up to 2% of the total burnt area of State forest.

A priority of the early salvage is to return to normal business activities. This means returning timber contractors to work and re-establishing supply to our customers.

VicForests foresters and silviculture specialists took to the skies recently as part of initial assessments of impact on the burnt forests and to assess opportunities for timber salvage. Additional ground reconnaissance will reveal the full extent of impacts and allow VF to categorise the severity of the fires on the forests.

It is expected that the salvage program will run for up to three years and will operate on a scale similar to that which followed the 2003 Alpine Fires.

A set of comprehensive environmental prescriptions, similar to those approved in 2003, is being assessed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment. These cover issues of soil and water, as well as flora and fauna values.

VicForests has commenced discussions with some communities that are likely to see an increase in log truck traffic in the short term. It has also initiated discussions with local government and VicRoads to manage timber cartage. All haulage contractors will operate by an established Code of Conduct for driver behaviour.

VicForests and its timber harvesting and haulage contractors will remain committed to any new fire emergency throughout the summer season.

This week's forums will also address certification, mill door sales and future timber auctions.

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