



VicForests

VicForests' Central Highlands Region

VicForests' Central Highlands region covers more than five million hectares across the central, north-east and south-east part of Victoria.

The region incorporates the Benalla-Mansfield, Central Gippsland, Dandenong and North East Forest Management Areas (FMA) as well as the area east of the Hume Highway in the Central FMA.

VicForests' Central Highlands region contains a range of different Eucalypt forest types. VicForests' harvesting operations in this region take place in mainly in Mountain Ash and Alpine Ash forests.

The Central Highlands' forests produce superb timber which is used in hardwood products such as high quality furniture, flooring and other building materials as well as quality writing and office paper.

The native timber industry directly employs over 500 people in VicForests' Central Highlands region.

This region is also home to the biggest concentration of saw mills in Victoria with these mills directly employing around 2000 staff.

Biodiversity and bushfires

While events such as bushfire can disturb the biodiversity of Victoria's forests they play an important role in their sustainability and regrowth.

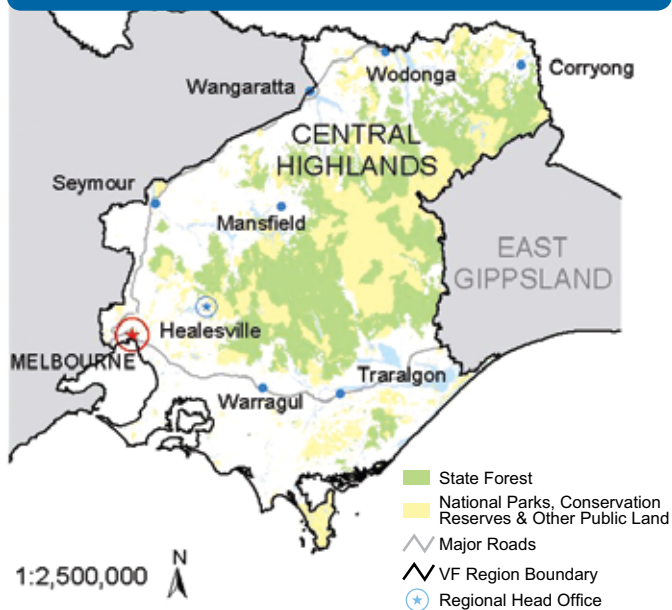
Similarly, timber harvesting can have a short-term impact on forest biodiversity. However, our forests are robust and resilient environments which recover well from this type of disturbance.

The forests in VicForests' Central Highlands region are a prime example of this resilience.

The majority of forest currently harvested in this region has grown back following the 1939 bushfires and previous timber harvesting.

The biodiversity present in these regrowth forests today highlights the fact that species do return following bushfire and harvesting operations.

VICFORESTS' CENTRAL HIGHLANDS REGION



Area in VicForests' Central Highlands Region:
More than 5 million hectares

Forest Management Areas which make up VicForests' Central Highlands Region:
Benalla/Mansfield, Central, Central Gippsland, Dandenong and North East Forest Management Areas

Amount of harvesting per year in VicForests' Central Highlands Region: **Approximately 2000 hectares**



Old Growth

In Victoria, 'old growth' forests are defined as forests in their oldest growth stage which show no obvious signs of disturbance from events such as wildfire¹.

No 'old growth' *Ash Eucalypt* forest is harvested in Victoria's Central Highlands. VicForests does not harvest any Ash trees which pre-date 1900 in this region.

Exceptional growing conditions mean that large trees do exist in this part of the State. However, the vast majority of these forests have regrown following bushfires in 1939 and do not meet the definition of 'old growth'.

Protection of 'Giant Trees'

VicForests has implemented a Giant Tree Protection Policy to ensure the protection of any tree greater than 4 metres in diameter or 85 metres in height.

Under this policy, these trees are not harvested and are also protected by VicForests' staff from the affects of timber harvesting operations.

VicForests recognises the importance of protecting these trees due to their ecological value as habitat, as well as their significant historical and aesthetic value.

This protection includes incorporating these trees into buffers or retained habitat islands, and using techniques such as extended clearing around the base of the trees to protect them from fire.

Protection of Leadbeater's Possum

VicForests inspects all coupes prior to harvesting for the presence of habitat suitable for Leadbeater's Possum – Victoria's faunal emblem.

VicForests' inspect each area proposed for harvesting to identify any forest which meets the criteria for Leadbeater's Possum habitat as outlined in the animal's Action Statement.

Any areas which meet the criteria as habitat for the Possum are excluded from timber harvesting operations to protect the animal's population.

There is also an extensive reserve system within VicForests' Central Highlands region designed to protect Leadbeater's Possum habitat. No timber harvesting is permitted within these reserves.

VicForests continues to work with individuals and groups undertaking research into Leadbeater's Possum. This research helps to improve our practices and the precautions taken to protect flora and fauna during harvesting operations.

The 2009 Black Saturday bushfires

Victoria's Central Highlands region was badly affected by the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009.

More than 100 VicForests' staff, and a large number of timber contractors, were directly involved in fighting these fires over a period of seven weeks.

VicForests' staff and contractors were a key component of the initial response to this disaster and provided a rare combination of skills, experience and machinery able to operate in difficult-to-access forested regions.

Salvage Harvesting in the Central Highlands

Following the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, VicForests has undertaken an extensive salvage harvesting program in the Central Highlands region.

This program has successfully taken timber from trees which were killed or severely damaged by the fires and would otherwise be left to rot away. These operations have harvested approximately 3000 hectares of the 400 000 hectares burnt by the fires.

Salvage harvesting operations comply with strict environmental standards and occur only in areas in which timber harvesting is permitted.

These operations are assessed by organisations including the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), Melbourne Water and auditors of the Australian Forestry Standard.

Salvage harvesting operations have allowed timber killed or badly damaged by bushfire to be utilised, reducing the need to harvest green, or unburnt, forest.

This salvage harvesting program is beginning to wind down but has provided a significant economic boost for local communities and businesses in areas affected by bushfire.

¹ Victoria's State of the Forests Report 2008 (Department of Sustainability & Environment)

