

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

Friday 12 January 2007

Foresters return to the fireground as salvage plans commence

VicForests has begun assessing the impact of fires in the Northeast, in an effort to ascertain forest health and look for timber salvage opportunities.

Foresters from the Mansfield District recently took to the skies as part of initial assessments of impact on the public forest estate and for timber salvage.

Senior Forest Officer, Peter Scales said that some timber harvesting contractors had already commenced salvage operations in previously approved coupes.

"The Ash forests of Victoria are particularly fire prone and require a rapid response in order to maximise the timber volume that can safely be extracted," Mr Scales said.

"It is safer to undertake salvage early, as the risk of falling limbs increases as time passes and the timber dries out."

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.

"As happened in 2003, our initial focus is on planning. VicForests is working cooperatively with Government to understand the real impacts of the fire on the forest, in particular to ensure that the forest regrows, and to begin to plan the salvage on a broad scale," Mr Scales said.

"Some residents in affected areas will begin to see an increase in log truck traffic in the coming weeks and months.

"More specifically, we expect to be working with the communities of, Mansfield, Merrijig and Jamieson," he said.

VicForests will be working with VicRoads, Mt Buller-Mt Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board, local government and the tourism industry to manage timber cartage and to ensure that communities are not adversely impacted by increased log truck traffic.

"We ask that the community be patient, while we work through the initial planning phase. If residents have immediate concerns, they should contact the VicForests Mansfield office," Mr Scales said.

"We're committed to finding opportunities for timber contractors to return to work. Additionally, a supplementary contractor workforce will be mobilised to be ready to begin further salvage operations, which will extend throughout the Northeast and Gippsland, as part of VicForests' normal business activities."

In the meantime, a significant number of VicForests staff and timber workers are continuing to contribute to the fire fighting effort.

"VicForests and its timber harvesting and haulage contractors remain committed to the fire emergency as it continues to unfold."

ENDS

Media enquiries: Peter Scales, Senior Forest Officer, VicForests. Tel. 5733 1230

Images: Helicopter reconnaissance reveal burnt areas of Mansfield State Forest, courtesy VicForests.