

Protecting Victoria's Flora and Fauna

The 7.8 million hectares¹ of native forest in Victoria are home to variety of plants and animals.

The vast majority of these forests, almost 90%², are unavailable or unsuitable for timber harvesting operations.

Our forests, and their flora and fauna, are protected by a detailed legislative framework which considers environmental, social and economic factors.

VicForests' harvesting operations comply with the comprehensive legislation which governs sustainable timber harvesting in Victoria.

This includes the *Sustainable Forest (Timber) Act 2004*, the *Flora & Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*, the *Conservation Forests and Lands Act 1987* and the *Code of Practice for Timber Production 2007*.

This legislative framework restricts the areas in which timber harvesting can take place, meaning enormous amounts of forest right across Victoria are not available to be harvested.

The area unavailable for harvesting includes around 4.8 million hectares³ of forest in Victoria protected in national parks and conservation reserves.

VicForests harvests around 5500 hectares⁴, or less than 0.1%, of Victoria's forests each year.

Careful prescriptions are also enforced in areas where harvesting operations occur.

These prescriptions are designed to protect important environmental, historical and recreational features.

They include measures such as:

- retaining habitat trees to allow for nesting
- retaining seed trees to help the forest regenerate
- retaining buffer zones alongside rivers, creeks and other key environmental features
- retaining additional protection zones where no harvesting is permitted or where harvesting operations are modified, and
- the creation of Special Protection Zones to minimise the potential impact on endangered species populations.

Biodiversity

A crucial part of sustainably managing Victoria's forests is to ensure there is suitable habitat and food for all species living in these forests.

One way of doing this is to ensure there are a range of different tree ages within the forest, with younger trees providing food for animals while older, hollow-bearing trees provide shelter.

While events such as bushfire disturb the biodiversity of Victoria's forests, they can also play an important role in the natural regrowth of these forests and the creation of a mosaic of forest age and structures.

Timber harvesting can also 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 biodiversity present in our regrowth forests today highlights the fact that species do return following bushfire and harvesting operations.



Leadbeater's Possum

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

The Department of Sustainability and Environment, in conjunction with an independent scientific advisory committee, developed rules regarding habitat characteristics which should be protected for Leadbeater's Possum.

These guidelines are outlined in Forest Management Plans and the Leadbeater's Possum Action Statement.

VicForests' staff undertake detailed field surveys in each area proposed for harvesting to identify the presence of hollow bearing trees.

Where an area meets the criteria for Leadbeater's Possum habitat an exclusion zone is put in place and no timber harvesting operations are permitted in that area.

The assessment does not require the confirmed sighting of Leadbeater's Possum in the area. The fact that an area meets the criteria as habitat is enough to have it protected from harvesting operations.

Protecting Biodiversity

VicForests puts a range of measures in place during its operations to protect biodiversity.

VicForests helps to ensure there is habitat available for native fauna by retaining habitat trees and seed trees in areas where harvesting takes place.

The retention of habitat islands, or unharvested areas within coupes, is another method designed to enable species to continue to grow and flourish in harvested regions.

Following harvesting operations, VicForests regenerates the forest in all areas which it harvests to ensure the trees grow back.

This regeneration is a detailed process which is crucial to sustaining our forests for the future (see **VicForests' Regeneration Fact Sheet** for more information).

¹ Australia's forests at a glance 2010 (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry)

² Victoria's State of the Forests Report 2008 (Department of Sustainability and Environment)

³ Victoria's State of the Forests Report 2008 (Department of Sustainability and Environment)

⁴ Sustainability Report 2009 (VicForests)

