



VicForests Planning Process

What areas are available to VicForests for harvest?

Native forests cover approximately 7.8 million hectares of Victoria, including 6.8 million hectares of State-owned native forest.¹

The vast majority of Victoria's forests, almost 90%, are either protected in reserves and National Parks and unavailable or unsuitable for harvest, due to timber quality, quantity, species or operational constraints.

There are comprehensive State government laws in place to ensure timber is harvested in a sustainable way, including the regeneration of all harvested areas.

How are harvest areas identified?

To identify areas suitable for harvesting (known as 'coupes') within the forest available for timber harvesting, a dedicated team of more than 20 VicForests planning specialists follow rigorous planning processes. VicForests' planners are highly skilled in mapping, biodiversity identification and forest measurement.

The planning process begins with a computer-based assessment that includes a review of forest management zones, identified threatened flora and fauna habitat, water (hydrological)

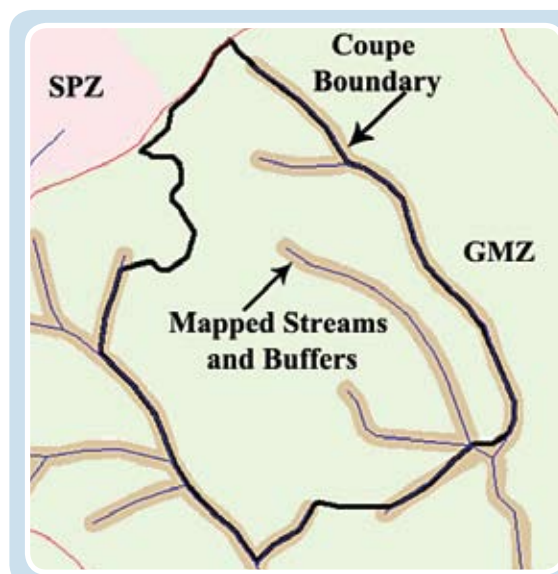
features, cultural sites, forest types and any other important environmental features. This information is provided to VicForests by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE). DSE employs a substantial team of biodiversity and forest management experts responsible for monitoring forest health throughout Victoria and updating the data, as required.

What does a field assessment involve?

A field assessment is conducted to confirm the findings of the computer assessment and identify other relevant features not initially recorded. These include:

- the presence of hydrological features (streams, creeks, pools)
- threatened flora and fauna habitat
- specific forest communities, such as areas of rainforest
- sites of cultural significance.

If any of these features are present, VicForests operational plans are modified to ensure they remain protected from harvesting operations. Topographical features, timber species and volume, and all roads and tracks, are also assessed and their locations marked on our operational maps.



These images show the same coupe area. The first is the computer generated map which identifies protected areas (SPZ) and streams and associated buffers. The second image shows the final harvested area. Note that both the recorded streams and those identified in subsequent field checks are protected.



How does the planning process translate into operational (harvesting) plans?

Once all this information is collated a 'coupe level plan' is developed. These plans include:

- A detailed map of the coupe area (area to be harvested) which outlines all of the required management prescriptions and areas that are to be excluded from harvesting
- The location of where access roads and operating areas will be constructed, to ensure the potential environmental impact of any activity is minimised
- All proposed management actions, including the information gathered from the computer and field assessments

These coupe level plans are then passed on to DSE for comment and approval on a Timber Release Plan (TRP) before any operations can begin.

Who is responsible for approval of coupes?

DSE assesses all coupe level plans within a TRP to ensure they meet the various legislative requirements regarding sustainable timber production, including prescriptions outlined in the Forest Management Plans and relevant Action Statements. Once DSE are confident these requirements have been met, the TRP is approved and harvesting may proceed.

How do the plans translate into actions?

Once approved, the coupe level plans are provided to VicForests operational staff, who are responsible for managing the field contractors who undertake our harvesting operations.

The contracting crew is given a copy of the coupe plan and are required to ensure that their harvesting operations comply with all prescriptions. The VicForests operational staff perform regular audits to check that all prescription contained within the plan are being followed.

When harvesting operations are completed, information is provided to VicForests' regeneration staff to enable them to plan and carry out the regeneration process. All harvested areas are regrown using seeds from the same species type that naturally occurred on the site.

Who ensures VicForests adheres to the management actions, as outlined in the 'coupe plan'?

All VicForests activities undergo rigorous internal and external auditing to ensure compliance with the Code of Practice, Forest Management Plans, Action Statements and VicForests' own management system requirements. This includes:

- Ensuring compliance with Australian Forestry Standard (AFS), which is recognised globally by the world's largest forest certification scheme, the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)
- Compliance checks and audits by DSE on both VicForests' systems and operations
- Internal auditing and monitoring across all VicForests' systems to ensure continual improvement of our processes
- Audits by Melbourne Water, where operations are within catchments managed under their authority

¹ Victorian Government Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria's State of the Forests Report, 2008.

