

The Great VicForests Log Grab in the Wombat Forest

Last June a massive storm event occurred in the Wombat State Forest causing thousands of trees to fall in parts of the forest.

A few weeks later the Victorian State government tabled a response to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) Central West Investigation in parliament and promised that the Lerderderg State Park and Wombat State Forest would be combined to form a new Wombat-Lerderderg National Park and a series of smaller regional parks. This followed a two year investigation by VEAC that found the Wombat Forest had very high conservation and ecological values, including providing critical habitat for over 40 threatened flora and fauna species.



A section of the Wombat Forest that suffered severe storm damage. Fuel loads on the ground may have increased but this has been offset by reduced canopy fuel loads.

Following the storm VicForests saw an opportunity to undertake a log grab before the Wombat Forest became a National Park, and without any community consultation listed 175 salvage logging coupes, over 80 of which were in the proposed National Park. Under pressure from VicForests and the logging industry the Dan Andrews Labor government allowed this log grab to proceed, without any consideration for the environmental impacts.

According to the state government and VicForests the main justification for the salvage logging was to reduce the fire risk caused by the fallen trees, but according to Australia's leading forest ecologist, David Lindenmayer

'The state government, in allowing VicForests to perform this salvaging, is increasing the likelihood and severity of bushfires.'

(The Age July 14 2022).

Whilst VicForests are removing logs, they are leaving large piles of bark, smaller branches and leaves on the coupes. It is these fine and medium fuels that mostly contribute to fire intensity in bushfires. Also, widespread soil disturbance resulting from



Piles of bark and other logging debris left on one of the salvage logging coupe in the Wombat Forest. This photo was taken after the VicForest contractors had finished at this coupe.

extracting logs dries forest soils for many years, further increasing fire risk.

Although the ground fuel loads have increased due to fallen trees this is more than offset by the significantly reduced canopy that has resulted from the storm.

Fallen logs in forests provide very valuable habitat for a wide variety of native fauna including small mammals, reptiles and insects. They also provide protection for regenerating trees and shrubs from browsing animals such as kangaroos and wallabies.

To extract the fallen logs VicForests has cleared large areas of standing forest to create log landings. Many kilometres of tracks are also being created resulting in widespread loss of understorey vegetation and massive soil disturbance in the wet winter conditions. Wetland habitats have been bulldozed and operations were carried out within 20-30m of the Loddon River. The areas being salvage logged are relatively weed free, however, the high levels of disturbance will encourage weed colonisation into the future.

The local and wider community cares deeply for the Wombat Forest and has fought very hard for its protection. We call on the State government to immediately halt the salvage logging operations in the Wombat Forest and create the promised parks.

Logging tracks causing widespread vegetation loss and soil disturbance at Babbington Hill, Wombat State Forest



Log landing at Babbington Hill in the Wombat Forest. Greater Gliders, an endangered species, had been detected living in trees that VicForests cleared for the log landing.

