

# Portland-Horsham Forests – proposed Forest Management Plans DSE 2006

Submission by  
Hamilton Field Naturalists Club, March 2006

We think that the proposed plan reflects fairly well the views of our group with respect to future management of the State forests/woodlands in the Portland/Horsham region. In particular, the guiding principles state clearly that biodiversity considerations must be accorded the highest priority when determining future uses and management strategies. That is a major advance from the previous position. However, there are specific areas where we would like some clarification or improvement to ensure that priority is actually achieved.

1. **Fire in the Landscape** – in the “Action Plan Examples” there is no mention of the need to protect older trees, particularly to maintain the hollows that are so necessary for the conservation of a great number of birds and mammals. This need was highlighted in meetings held to develop the draft plan. This serious omission must be rectified. We have pointed out at the meetings and in other forums that care must be taken to remove debris from around these trees before environmental burns are conducted. With wildfires, every effort must be made to preserve such trees (rather than allowing them to burn down, cutting them down or bulldozing them). Specific mention of these issues must be made in this document – it is not good enough to suppose that these issues will be highlighted in future Action Plans that have yet to be developed and presented to us. Our experience has been that managers do not adopt actions that are not spelled out in policy documents.
2. **Forest Resources** – we have 3 major concerns here. While there is currently no allocation of timber for sawlogs, this draft suggests that this situation will change. This seems to be implied in the statement “*Evaluate silvicultural methods for timber harvesting...*” We have no global objection to harvesting of timber from some areas of State Forest, particularly when it concerns small rural industries, but do have concerns about the methods used and the system adopted. We hope the Action Plans do put biodiversity concerns first.

The second issue is the mapping used and the lack of adequate corridors linking north and south. Clearly, the map closely reflects the map used for the West RFA process. In the Portland area, particularly, the areas that were set aside for conservation purposes in the RFA process were areas that the foresters did not want. The areas of good timber all went into the timber harvesting sectors. There is no good reason now, when there is no commercial sawlog industry for much of these blocks, why that mapping base should be enshrined in the present process. Some, at least, of those areas should be included in the SPZ zones, to further protect the status of endangered species (such as the Yellow-bellied Glider, Powerful Owl, Masked Owl and Potoroo) and poorly represented EVCs. We want to see much more forest devoted to wider, linking blocks that form corridors extending from the Cobboboonee forest through Hotspur, Digby, Wilkin and Dergholm. This could be achieved by increasing the proportion of land classified as SPZ in the western portion of the Portland-Horsham region (see enclosed map, where shaded areas show how the area of SPZ can be increased). That would achieve much for the region’s wildlife and should assist conservation of the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, because much of those forest areas contain brown Stringybark that can be managed sympathetically to produce seed for their needs.

Our third issue is as follows: we welcome the suggestion that some woody debris should be left after firewood removal but wonder how that can be enforced. There is no current regulation of that, nor the staff to ensure that it could happen. Falling of dead hollow-bearing trees and removal

of wood from the woodlands from Wilkin to Edenhope has been a major concern to us. In some of our woodlands there is no adequate level of wood left on the ground for several species of birds, reptile and mammals that rely on it. The Stone Curlew, Brown Treecreeper, Brown Antechinus and Yellow-footed Antechinus are examples. More areas in the box-red gum-yellow gum woodlands should be clearly identified by signage as being excluded from wood gathering.

Another mapping issue – one area designated for timber harvesting lies just west of Nolans Creek in the Brimboal Forest area. That small area contains some large River Red Gums and smaller specimens that one-day will contain hollows capable of being used by Red-tailed Black Cockatoos and Powerful Owls. Both have been recorded in this block. The danger of leaving this area as a General Management Zone (as designated in the West RFA maps) is that these trees cannot be protected from logging.

3. **Forest Recreation** – we have several concerns:

Camp Fires – we believe that there should be a prohibition of all campfires in the proclaimed “fire season” (from Dec through to March) in all State Forests, Parks and reserves. That would achieve 2 objectives: reduce the number of wildfires and conserve wood. The Action Plan calls for “*encouraging use of fuel stoves...*” but how else would that be achieved?

Motor cycles and Horses – we do not want motor cycle clubs or horse riding groups to use tracks and roads for group activities either through or alongside SPZ areas. We particularly do not accept their right to use any road that they want to use. Their activities are not acceptable to other values of those areas of forest. They need to be catered for in other areas of lesser value.