

Rubicon Forest Protection Group Submission to Murrindindi Shire Council on the Draft 2019-20 Budget

In June 2016 the Rubicon Forest Protection Group made a presentation to the then Murrindindi Council on the fate awaiting the Rubicon State Forest if logging continued as planned. Our submission pointed to the amazing tourist potential of the area and how this was being ruined by the scale of logging on top of the vast area of ash forest killed in the 2009 fire.

Distressingly, logging has continued largely unabated. The Royston Range, Middle Range and Rubicon Valley are now effectively logged out severely compromising their tourism potential, yet VicForests propose even more coupes in these areas. However the main focus of logging has shifted eastward to the relatively lightly logged Torbreck Range, to the eastern side of the Snobs Creek Valley and southward to Cambarville. The prospect of widespread logging of these extraordinarily biodiverse and beautiful areas is utterly appalling.

We again now urge Council to do more to help protect what is left of the over-logged forests in our Shire, by developing and promoting their extraordinary tourist potential. This includes pressing the State Government to do more to promote and protect the forest, and help our Shire build a tourism future involving its wonderful natural assets.

In terms of pressing the State Government, we ask that as part of the tourism and events strategy which Council is developing (but about which we know little) provision is made in the 2019-20 Budget to **establish a Murrindindi Forest Tourism Development and Promotion Committee (MFTDPC)**.

While Council may not have stewardship over most of the lands in question, promoting tourism – and nature-based tourism in particular – does lie within Murrindindi Council's responsibility. In this vein, we welcome the Shire's recent support for forest and mountain cycling events.

Council would convene and resource this Committee which would be responsible for investigating, promoting and where appropriate seeking funding for the forest tourism development initiatives such as those set out in our 2016 submission, in the Appendix below and as may emerge through the consultation process. The Committee's particular focus would be on the Rubicon, Marysville, Toolangi and Black Range State Forests and adjoining forest parks and reserves. The Appendix to this submission sets out some possible initiatives in the Rubicon State Forest that RFPG believes would significantly boost tourism in the Shire.

Membership of the Committee would include:

- MSC – Councillor to Chair
- DELWP – Murrindindi Regional Manager
- RFPG – Convenor
- Taungurung Land and Waters Council – Cultural and Natural Resources Officer
- Parks Victoria – representative to be determined
- Regional Development Victoria – representative to be determined

Meanwhile, we also ask that provision be made in the 2019-20 Budget for **the reinstatement of a 2WD gravel road at the eastern end of Cathedral Lane** alongside the pine plantation – as we have called for since 2016 – as Council's contribution to the proposed scenic loop drive from Cathedral Range State Park to Blue Range Rd and back to the Park via Tweed Spur Rd. We expect this will require Council increasing the proposed \$341k set aside for major maintenance of gravel roads within the Shire. Based on previous discussions with Council (see attached email conversation with former Councillor Christine Challen), we had been expecting such provision to have been made already.

Appendix – some tourism development opportunities

Scenic drives

1. Create scenic drive linking Cathedral Range State Park with the Rubicon State Forest by upgrading Tweed Spur Road and Cathedral Lane to 2WD standard, and resurfacing Chitty Ridge Road
2. Develop and promote two scenic tourist drives from Marysville to Rubicon via Cambarville Road and Royston River Road, with an alternative route via Snobs Creek Road and Sandstone Road to Eildon, and develop accompanying ecological, historic, geological and scenic information for publication online, as brochures and via DELWP's 'More to Explore' app.
3. Develop a Big Trees Tourist Drive for Toolangi, Black Range, Rubicon and Marysville State Forests

Walking trails

4. Re-open the long-closed walk to Lower Royston Cascades and Elephant Rock from the Rubicon Power Station as a relatively easy 2 hour walk.
5. Develop and promote a walking trail from Lake Mountain Resort via Royston Gap to Mt Bullfight as a higher grade trail for more experienced bushwalkers.
6. Develop and promote a historic timber tramway walking trail from Rubicon Power Station to top of the Royston Range

Picnic Grounds

7. Establish picnic grounds (table +/- campfire structure) at various picturesque locations in the forest with short walks to nearby beauty spots including waterfalls and lookouts, such as.
 - on Blue Range Road at Little River crossing
 - on Quartz Creek Road at Rubicon River Crossing
 - on south end of Royston River Road near extensive rainforest area
 - on No.5 Track at Snobs Creek crossing

Waterfalls

8. Re-open the long-closed walking track to the base of the Snobs Creek falls so the falls can be appreciated in their entirety
9. There are many other waterfalls that could be opened up for tourist visitation, including:
 - Royston Falls accessed via a short walk from the Royston Dam
 - Fuscus Falls via a short walk from Quartz Creek Road
 - Evelyn Falls via a short walk from Cambarville Road
 - Little River Falls and Cascades (in Cathedral Range SP) via a walk from Tweed Spur Road

Lookouts

10. Improve access to Mt Bullfight and Stillman rock lookout by maintaining Mt Bullfight Road and spraying the roadside blackberry infestation
11. Establish lookout at highest point at the north end of Blue Range, with access from Parks Road and driveway into coupe Snifter which has views over the Cathedral Range to the Black Range

Rubicon Valley Historic Area

12. Improve the Rubicon Valley Historic Area with better signposting, improved access, picnic areas, walking tracks information, and online storytelling of the area's great history.
13. Investigate feasibility of permitting lilo trips along aqueducts in RVHA
14. Conduct feasibility study with RDV support into opening haulage line with tourist cable railway from Rubicon Power Station (with AGL and ATTA)

Roads

15. Seek funds to seal Snobs Creek Road to the Falls carpark and Rubicon Road to the Rubicon Power Station, and to upgrade/resurface Chitty Ridge Road

Indigenous heritage

16. Create an Taungurung Cultural Heritage Trail including Naah Naah Djong (the Cathedral Range) and early forced re-settlement sites for Taungurung people that teaches tourists about cultural values of the both the forest and wider landscape in the local area.

Attachment

Re: Letter to Council from RFPG

Christine Challen (CChallen@murrindindi.vic.gov.au) [Add contact](#)

30/08/2016 1:28 PM

To: nick;

Cc: info RFPG; Ken & Di Deacon;

Thanks Nick.

These are great suggestions and most welcome. As you'd be aware, putting them into practice will require a lot of negotiation with Parks Vic, DELWP, AGL and others. All do-able but will take some time.

This Council is about to go into a caretaker phase for the October elections. I will ensure either directly (if I'm reelected) or indirectly (if I have to pass this on to a successor) that these ideas are tabled and considered.

No doubt we'll all have to be involved in the advocacy stages.

The extension of Cathedral Lane as an accessible 2WD thoroughfare is something I can put to our Infrastructure Dept in the meantime, for possible consideration in the 2017/2018 budget.

I'll keep you updated with relevant info.

Kind regards,

Cr Christine Challen
Murrindindi Shire Council
Ph 03 5772 0337
Mobile 0419 552 020
Fax 03 5772 2291
cchallen@murrindindi.vic.gov.au
www.murrindindi.vic.gov.au

On 28 Aug 2016, at 12:01 pm, nick <nlegge@bigpond.net.au> wrote:

Hello Christine

Thanks for agreeing to chase up the fate of the RFPG's tourist development proposals that seem to have dropped off the Shire's radar.

Ken Deacon's letter to Margaret Rae outlining these proposals is attached.

If logging in the Rubicon State Forest is to be wound down substantially, as our group believes is now critical, we need Council to take an active role in promoting and building forest-based tourism opportunities.

Our letter urges Council to lobby the State Government to improve access to and awareness of our area's outstanding natural and historic features, including Mt Torbreck, Mt Bullfight, Royston Falls, Elephant Rock and the Rubicon Historic Area. RFPG is also in the process of developing a funding proposal for an interpretive trail that would illustrate the origins of the Cerberean Caldera, which is the source of one of the biggest eruptive episodes in the history of the Earth.

cheers

nick

<RFPG tourist proposals letter to MSC April.pdf>