

Chopper over Rubicon

by Ken Deacon Convenor, Rubicon Forest Protection Group

THE chopper took off eight times from the front paddock, giving eight groups of passengers an aerial tour of the Rubicon-Royston Range and current logging operations.

The event, organised by the Rubicon Forest Protection Group on Monday May 16, provided opportunities for local residents, forest scientists, photographers, and a documentary film maker to inspect close-up the scale and intensity of logging now taking place.

Greens federal election candidate Jenny O'Connor and ALP candidate Eric Kerr joined in the event.

Indigenous elder Uncle Roy Patterson gave a welcome to country and reminded the group that we do not 'own' mother earth any more than we could 'own' our mothers. We are custodians of nature, that means looking after it for future generations.

When he was a logger in the Rubicon in the 1950s, they were only allowed to take five trees per acre, so the forest remained.

From the air, the scene was a patchwork of mature post 1939 ash forest, pale green logged patches, and patches of bare earth where large-scale machinery was clearing vegetation and stacking logs.

Later, a convoy of 4WD vehicles went on a conducted tour of recently logged coupes and areas planned for future logging.

They saw a new gravel road and bridge across the Royston River through a soon-to-be-logged mountain ash coupe called 'Calvin' which abuts an area of pristine temperate rainforest.

A coupe along the Royston River tourist road leading to the historic aqueduct has recently been logged right up to the road with no buffer.

Adjacent hillsides to the east, stretching over a kilometre to the ridge, are also scheduled for harvesting in the near future.

In the Blue Range the visitors saw a soon-to-be logged alpine ash coupe containing tall, hollow-bearing trees that provide habitat for native wildlife.

En route there were logged coupes now choked with wattle and blackberry.



A shot taken from the helicopter of ridge-top logging that has impacted on the view from the Taggerty-Eildon Road. This image shows 'seed trees' killed by the regeneration burn. -S



The Rubicon Forest Protection Group provided helicopter rides for interested participants over the Rubicon and Royston Range on Monday May 16. -S

The current position of the State Government on the Great Forest National Park

THE State Government has not determined whether to establish the proposed Great Forest National Park.

The GFNP is a concept which is being pursued by supporters advocating for the establishment of the park.

The State Government has formed a Task Force representing industry, environment

and community interests to consider all aspects of the GFNP, including the future of timber harvesting.

If this task force reaches a consensus regarding the formation of the GFNP then the State Government may explore further in order to determine whether the GFNP will be established.

Results of Independent Report into GFNP

THE Yarra Ranges Council resolved to commission an independent assessment of the proposed Great Forest National Park in October, 2015.

The assessment and report were prepared by consultants Dench McLean Carlson, in conjunction with REMPLAN and K2 Planning.

The report was returned to the Yarra Ranges Council in March, 2016, and it includes an assessment of the economic, social, cultural and environmental costs and benefits of the proposed GFNP for the Yarra Ranges.

A summary of report is as follows:

"The proposed Great Forest National Park would incorporate 93 per cent of the existing public land in the Yarra Ranges Local Government Area and no additional public land would be created.

The public land proposed to be incorporated into the park includes the following Parks and State Forests: Yarra Ranges National Park, Upper Yarra Reservoir Park, Maroondah Reservoir Park, parts of the Kinglake National Park, Kurth Kiln Regional Park State Forests parts of the Yarra State Forest, Big River State Forest, Marysville State Forest and Toolangi State Forest.

These areas hold high value environmental assets and also include a number of Melbourne's key water storages.

The existing parks and state forests provide protection to these assets and the existing parks and state forests combined offer a diverse range of experiences and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

Parks Victoria estimate that the parks in the proposed area receive more than 495,500 visitors per annum.

There is no data regarding the level of visitation to the state forests however, local traders, and DELWP regional staff, report

that there are substantial number of people visiting these areas.

The available data is unable to provide any insight into what proportion of visitors to these parks and/or state forests are residents in the Yarra Ranges LGA.

The visitors to the existing parks and state forests already make a significant contribution to the Yarra Range's visitor economy which is estimated to generate more than 2,700 jobs in the local economy.

Traders in the towns that are the gateways to these areas observe that people visiting these areas form a significant component of their revenues.

The state forests also provide for timber harvesting. VicForests estimate that, on average, 0.15 per cent of the 150,732 Ha of native forest in the Yarra Ranges LGA is harvested per annum.

The related industrial timber industry activity is estimated to generate more than 110 jobs or more than 0.3 per cent of employment in the local economy.

The proponents of the Great Forest National Park advocate that it would generate significant visitation from local and international tourists which would benefit the local economy however, there is no projected level of visitation, beyond that already experienced, provided by the proponents.

The level of visitation would need to surpass current levels if it were to generate substantial increases in employment and investment.

The proposed park would have little impact on the outcomes of the Yarra Ranges Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy or its Recreation and Open Space Strategy beyond the impact that is generated by the existing parks and/or state forests.

The establishment of the proposed Great Forest National Park would not increase the space available for recreational use,

this suggests there would be little impact on increased usage by local residents, and therefore, little impact on health related outcomes.

The Great Forest National Park proponents suggest that most of the existing recreational activities, including horse riding, hunting and 4WD would continue.

It is not clear if there would be any restrictions on where, and when, activities can occur.

If there were any limitations to such activities, it could be expected that the state forests would receive less visitors and less usage by residents.

The lack of a baseline regarding the current use of the parks/state forests by Yarra Ranges residents makes it difficult to determine how any change may impact future participation.

A cessation of timber harvesting, as advocated by the Great Forest National Park proponents, would support some key elements of council's environment strategy and, in particular, council's aspirations regarding the protection of native plants and animals and the enhancement of their habitats.

A cessation of timber harvesting would also likely see related timber industry activities in the Yarra Ranges cease.

The resulting loss of employment would have particular negative economic and social impact on some of the smaller towns in the Yarra Ranges LGA."

The full report can be read at yarraranges.vic.gov.au/files/assets/public/webdocuments/temporary-holding-docs/public-notice/gfnp-final-report.pdf

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