



# Rubicon Forest Protection Group Inc.

Promoting the significant montane ash forests, wildlife and other unique values of Rubicon State Forest



Calvin Coupe recently logged. It adjoins several other coupes also logged on steep slopes of the Royston Range.



Flea Creek Coupe - previously known habitat of Leadbeater's Possum



Rubicon State Forest is located in the Shire of Murrindindi, just 2 hours north-east of Melbourne.

*Rubicon Forest Protection Group Inc. promotes the significant biodiversity, scenic, historic and cultural heritage values as well as the exceptional tourism, education and recreation opportunities with their associated economic benefits.*

The rapid and staggering scale and intensity of current logging operations in the montane ash forests (Mountain Ash, Alpine Ash and Shining Gum) of the Central Highlands, including Rubicon State Forest, combined with the devastation caused by the 2009 Black Saturday bushfire and subsequent salvage logging, are rapidly compromising a sustainable future for these majestic forest environments.

# Environmental Issues

## Threatened species and ecological communities

Timber, pulpwood (for paper) and post-fire salvage logging in the montane ash forests is currently ecologically unsustainable, giving scant regard for critical environmental assessments and safeguards. This approach has severe biodiversity consequences that disregard the spirit, and possibly the legalities, of State and Commonwealth environmental legislation.

Mature montane ash forests, especially hollow-bearing trees and dead stags, are essential habitat of the critically endangered Leadbeater's possum, *Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*, vulnerable Greater Glider, *Petauroides volans* and Sooty Owl, *Tyto tenebricosa*, other fauna and flora, together with aquatic habitats of threatened fauna like the Barred Galaxias, *Galaxias fuscus*.



Leadbeater's Possum has a very restricted distribution, being largely confined to the montane ash forests of the Central Highlands. Habitat loss and fragmentation caused by current logging operations and bushfires threaten its long term survival.

In addition to the direct environmental impacts within logging coupes, the extensive logging road network cuts through previously intact ash forests and Antarctic Beech/rainforest communities alongside waterways. Together with expansive log landings, large areas previously subject to logging and new roads are now subject to erosion and infested with impenetrable blackberries, thistles and dense wattle stands. Also, many coupes show poor regeneration of mountain and alpine ash while others become a monoculture of ash trees, lacking a diversity of understorey shrubs and ferns.

## Water catchment, climate change impacts and carbon sequestration

Logging or killing by fire of 1939 regrowth mountain ash forests, results in an initial rise in streamflow due to reduced transpiration, but after about 10-15 years the growing forest starts to use more water. Importantly, this effect of lower water yield lasts many decades.

Lowered water yield could have serious long-term consequences for downstream users in the context of:

- declining rainfall and hence streamflow due to long-term climate change,
- the forest losses in the 2009 fire, and
- the extensive logging of the remaining 1939 regrowth forests.

Loss of mature ash forests contributes to climate change. These forests extract carbon from the atmosphere and lock up large amounts of carbon, which is released into the atmosphere when they are logged.

## Fire management

Young ash forests are more fire-prone than older forests. A recent, detailed study carried out by Australian scientists indicates that intensive clear-fell logging significantly increases the severity of bushfires in Mountain Ash forests. Their analysis of 10,000 sites in Central Highlands forests that were burned on Black Saturday found that tree age was more significant than other variables in contributing to fire severity. The most severe fires that consumed tree crowns and forest canopies occurred in stands of young Mountain Ash between seven and 36 years of age. In stands more than 36 years old, the risk of crown fire decreases because the trees are taller and gaseous eucalyptus fuel is more dispersed. Older forests are less dense and a moist understorey including rainforest plants, ferns and mosses, acts as a retardant.

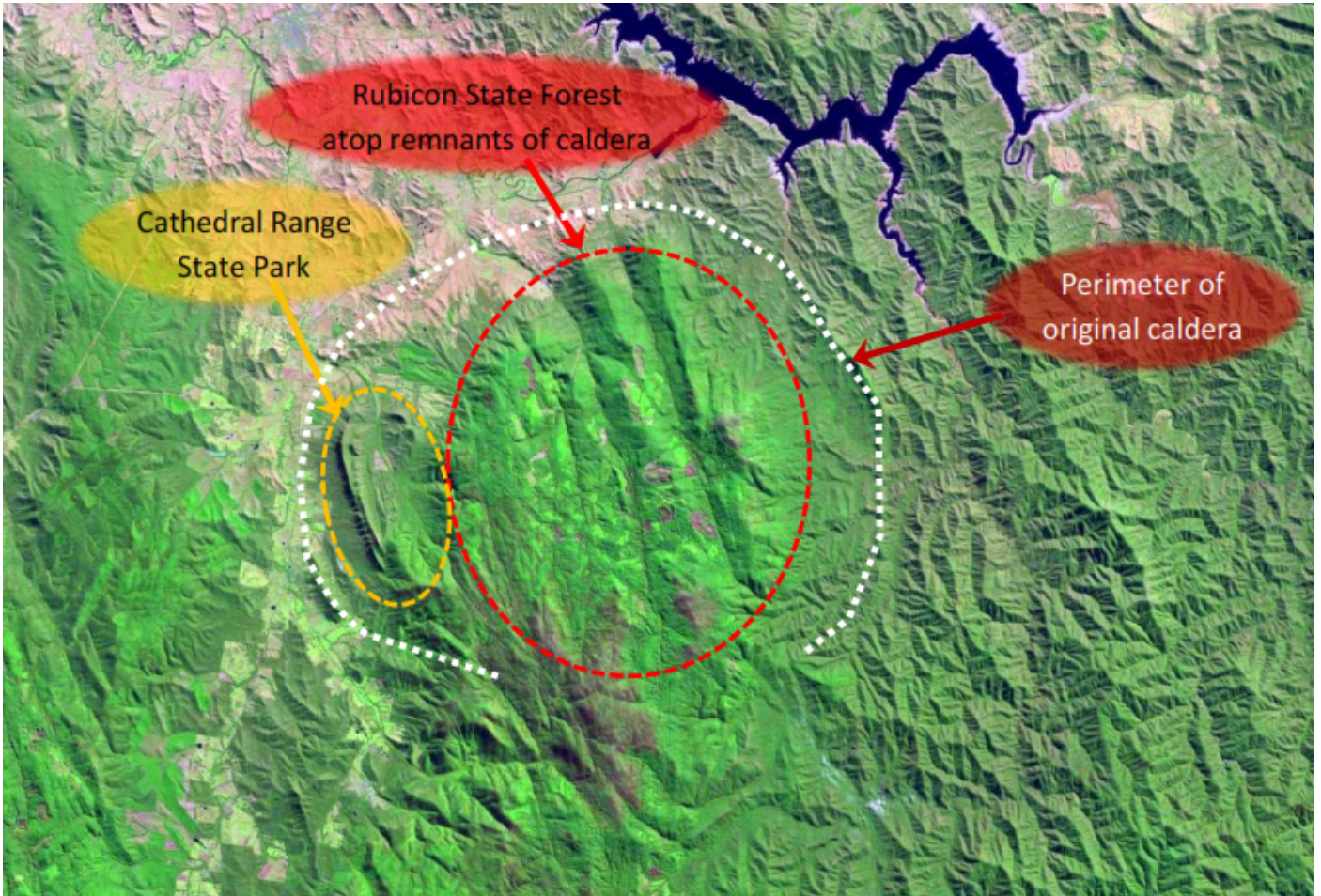
*Further information: Mountain Ash - fire, logging and the future of Victoria's giant forests, by David Lindenmayer, David Blair, Lachlan McBurney and Sam Banks. CSIRO Publishing, 2015.*

# Montane ash forests, volcanic origins and history

## What is so special about Rubicon State Forest?

Untapped tourism, recreational and educational potential associated with the iconic montane ash forests and their:

- Scenic beauty
- Rich biodiversity, including the world's tallest flowering plant, Mountain Ash, *Eucalyptus regnans*
- Significant historic and indigenous cultural values
- Exceptional recreational, educational and tourism opportunities with associated economic benefits
- Extraordinary volcanic origins of the Cerberean Caldera



## Cerberean Caldera, one of the biggest volcanic eruptions on earth!

About 365 million years ago, a cylinder shaped block of the Earth's crust, 27 km in diameter, collapsed into a large magma chamber. The magma erupted violently forming a circular basin, known as a "cauldron" or "caldera" which filled with layers of volcanic rocks. The caldera's eroded rim reveals spectacular waterfalls and rugged ranges.

## Rubicon Valley Historic Area

The Rubicon Valley Historic Area, now recognised on the Victorian Heritage Register includes features such as the recently reconstructed "15000' siphon" trestle bridge on part of the original tramline, an undulating walk along the tramline to Rubicon dam, open aqueduct, huge pipeline with the odd leak, various sawmill structures and Royston power station. These structures reflect the fascinating history associated with Victoria's first hydro-electricity generation scheme dating back to 1929.

# How can you help to protect and promote Rubicon State Forest

## Key issues

- The current rapid rate, intensity and extent of clear-fell logging operations is unsustainable. Unless the harvesting rate is drastically cut immediately, there will be no largely intact areas of tall mature ash forests in this area for many decades, with the delicate forest ecology likely to collapse;
- Logging operations show minimal regard for “best practice” environmental assessments and protection of important natural and cultural features such as wildlife corridors and refuges, hollow-bearing trees and trees with potential to develop hollows, waterways, Antarctic Beech/riparian forests and scenic escarpments;
- The exceptional biodiversity of the montane ash forests is rapidly being lost. Small, isolated patches of forest reserved to protect Leadbeater’s Possum from extinction are totally inadequate. Also, there are many regeneration failures of logged coupes and loss of understorey plants integral to the forest ecology. Extensive spread of blackberries and other weeds throughout areas subject to logging and roadworks are now encroaching into previously pristine forest;
- Increased fire risk of regenerating forests following logging, combined with long-term impacts on water catchments and climate change;
- Loss of local amenity for local communities, recreational users and also, education and tourism businesses;
- Opportunities for a sustainable future for Rubicon State Forest based on recreation, education and tourism with their associated jobs and economic benefits are being severely compromised;

## What can you do?

- Insist on comprehensive environmental, cultural and socio-economic assessments of all areas prior to any further logging and establish a comprehensive, representative reserve system;
- Request the Victorian Government to revise the Code of forest Practice and strengthen its enforcement via an independent statutory body;
- Promote the urgent need to transition from native forests to plantations for timber resources and pulpwood for paper;
- Write letters to and communicate with State and Commonwealth politicians;
- Express issues and concerns through social media and other media;
- Join in activities of the Rubicon Forest Protection Group Inc.: [info@rubiconforest.org](mailto:info@rubiconforest.org);

