

19 April 2016

Ken Deacon
Convenor, Rubicon Forest Protection Group
c/- Rubicon Road
Rubicon VIC 3172

info@rubiconforest.org

Cr Margaret Rae
Mayor
Murrindindi Shire Council
Perkins Street
Alexandra VIC 3714

Dear Cr Rae,

Unsustainability of VicForests management in Central Forest Management Area

The Rubicon Forest Protection Group (RFPG) was formed in 2015 by a group of local residents concerned about the unsustainable scale of logging in the ash forests of the Central Forest Management Area (FMA), including the Rubicon State Forest, and the failure by VicForests to adequately protect the range of values that this forest provides, including its tourist potential.

The Group prepared a detailed submission to VicForests and the Victorian Government demonstrating why we believe the current rate of harvesting is completely unsustainable and drawing attention to specific instances showing how harvesting practices are reducing local biodiversity. The submission, available on our website, www.rubiconforest.org, is attached.

The submission also argues that the scale and intensity of logging that is now occurring means that all the harvestable stands in the Rubicon Forest will be cut out by the early 2020s. While the logging activity is currently contributing positively to the Murrindindi economy, once the forest has been converted to a dense plantation-like state, with much reduced biodiversity, it will be very hard to develop the many tourist opportunities that the Rubicon Forest could otherwise offer. On the other hand, a much reduced harvesting rate could allow the timber industry and forest-based tourism developments to co-exist.

The Group has developed a range of tourist development ideas based on the Rubicon Forest that we believe deserve support from Council, either directly (e.g. upgrading Cathedral Lane) or in a lobbying or facilitative capacity. These ideas are set out on subsequent pages of this letter.

The Group would welcome an opportunity to discuss our submission with Council, and so put Council in a better position to decide whether it is prepared to endorse the submission, and our tourist development suggestions, to the Victorian Government.

Yours sincerely

Ken Deacon
Convenor, RFPG

Tourist Development Proposals for the Rubicon State Forest

1. Upgrade Tweed Spur track and Cathedral Lane/Chitty Ridge Track to 2WD standard to create a wonderful scenic drive linking the Cathedral Range State Park to the Rubicon State Forest

Tweed Spur track (yellow on map below) runs from Cooks Mill in the Cathedral Range State Park to Blue Range Road (mauve on the map) on the Cerberean Plateau and while officially 4WD is of a gentle grade and in fair condition. Chitty Ridge track (orange) also has a gentle grade and is nominally 2WD but its present condition makes it effectively 4WD. The eastern end of Cathedral lane (light blue), which is a shire road, is in very poor condition and is slow going in 4WD.

If this sequence of tracks (apart from Blue Range Rd which is fine) was upgraded visitors to the Cathedral State Park would have the option of a wonderful forest drive with fabulous views (from Chitty Ridge Track). The geological history of the Cerberean Plateau (remnants of a massive extinct volcano) is fascinating and there are various road cuttings where descriptive signage could be installed explaining this history, as well as signs illustrating the logging and fire history of the various forest stands that are encountered. A walking track could also be constructed to the Little River Falls from Tweed Spur Road, as could a camping area on Blue Road Range adjacent to a lovely creek.



Google earth

miles
km

3
6



2. Develop other self-guided driving tours on the Plateau highlighting historic, ecological and geologically significant spots

At present DELWP produce several 'Forest Notes' brochures, one focused on the Rubicon Historic Area and one on the Snobs Creek area, but these are now rather dated. For example, the road to Morris Lookout is barely of 2WD standard, and some of the other roads marked as tracks are now easily of 2WD standard, thanks to the needs of log trucks. But there are other areas that a bigger publication, or further brochures, could highlight, such as Mt Bullfight, the Royston Falls, the Rubicon Falls, the myrtle beech rainforest towards the Royston River headwaters as well as various road cuttings that illustrate the area's fascinating geological past.

3. Open up Royston Falls and Elephant Rock via a tourist walk from the Power Station.

Up until around the middle of last century, a nature walk existed from the Power Station via Elephant Rock to the Royston Falls. This should be re-opened.

4. Improve signposting and access to Rubicon Historic Area

The Rubicon Historic area with its aqueducts and trestle bridges is one of the area's treasures. If this was more widely known and better signposted it would act as a much bigger tourist drawcard.

5. Check if Rubicon Timber Tramway museum has any spare items to establish a mini display at the Power Station

There are very few remnants of the early logging industries that once gave the Rubicon area a much larger population than today. All that changed with the 1939 fires that destroyed many of the mills, and not a few timber workers.

It would make sense if some of this early history, including the impact of the 1939 fire, could be brought to life with a static display of some of the early machinery, as well as explanatory signage.

6. Open haulage line with cog railway from Rubicon Power Station

This would undoubtedly be a costly initiative, but would have the potential to become a major tourist drawcard for the area.

It is possible that the Alexandra Timber Tramway Association, which includes some highly expert engineers and other skilled tradespeople, could, if funding was found, potentially take responsibility for this initiative.

It would also obviously require the agreement and involvement of AGL as the owners of the infrastructure.

7. Establish mountain bike trails, incorporating aqueducts

Mountain bike riding is still rapidly growing in popularity and while there is a trail near the camping grounds, the creation of other trails, including some that followed the aqueducts, would undoubtedly encourage more visitors.