

FRIENDS OF HODDLES CREEK NEWSLETTER



Wildlife homes spared

Future burns to consider wildlife habitat trees

Each year the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP), together with Parks Victoria (PV) and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) carries out a fuel management program in Victoria's public parks and forests to reduce the risk of bushfire to communities, property and the environment. The program had scheduled a planned burn for this autumn for an area within the Kurth Kiln Regional Park (KKRP) near Glenara Road, Hoddles Creek.

Since this burn was first announced some years ago, the Friends of Hoddles Creek (FOHC) have questioned the protective benefit it would provide to both human life and property and to the environment.

FOHC investigation has revealed that this area is not considered by DELWP to be a Priority Fuel Management Area and that DELWP have zoned the area for burning when there is ecological purpose. To date both DELWP & PV have refused to discuss the details of this burn and no ecological objective for the burn has been provided.

Ecological significance of the burn area

In 2013 FOHC members exploring this small corner of the KKRP discovered a very special ecosystem around three unnamed tributaries of the Hansen Creek. Following

this "discovery", numerous people representing PV (land manager for the KKRP), Melbourne Water, Department of Land & Primary Industries (DEPI), Friends of Kurth Kiln, owl expert Ed McNabb and botanist Dr Graeme Lorimer, have all visited the proposed burn site.

These visits confirmed that biologically significant rainforest related vegetation existed within the burn area that should never be deliberately burned.



Rake hoeing around a habitat tree in an effort to provide some protection during the planned burn.

Furthermore it was found that the forest consisted of a mosaic of different age classes (time since fire), including long unburnt, which is seriously under represented both within the Park and more broadly within the Yarra Ranges.

Substantial amounts of long unburnt forest are critical for the survival of fauna in this area. Parks Victoria and DELWP are unable to explain how reducing this

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mosaic to a single age class (a likely consequence of a planned burn) will lead to more resilient ecosystems.

100's of habitat trees at risk

Following the initial survey of the gullies and tributaries, the FOHC in collaboration with DEPI/PV commenced a project documenting the hollow-bearing and habitat trees within the area. Hollow-bearing trees are a critical resource for fauna including gliders, possums, owls, many other birds, and bats within the Yarra Ranges. Planned burning is one process contributing to the loss of hollow-bearing trees. Identifying these trees prior to burning is necessary so that measures can be taken (such as rake hoeing around the trees or applying fire retardant foams) to protect the trees, as is required by DELWP biodiversity prescriptions for planned burning. The data has been collected in strict accordance with DELWP protocols for assessing Habitat and Hollow Bearing Trees. The method includes recording GPS coordinates, tree species, trunk diameter, the number & size of hollows as well as taking photos of the crown and base of each tree.

The survey work is about 90% complete with 691 Habitat and Hollow Bearing Trees having been recorded to date. Many of them are actually dead trees, and given the relatively dry conditions of late, these precious habitat trees, and their inhabitants will likely be destroyed if this proposed burn goes ahead.

FOHC work needs to be considered

Having obtained the data the next step is to prioritize the identified trees so that an effective tree protection plan can

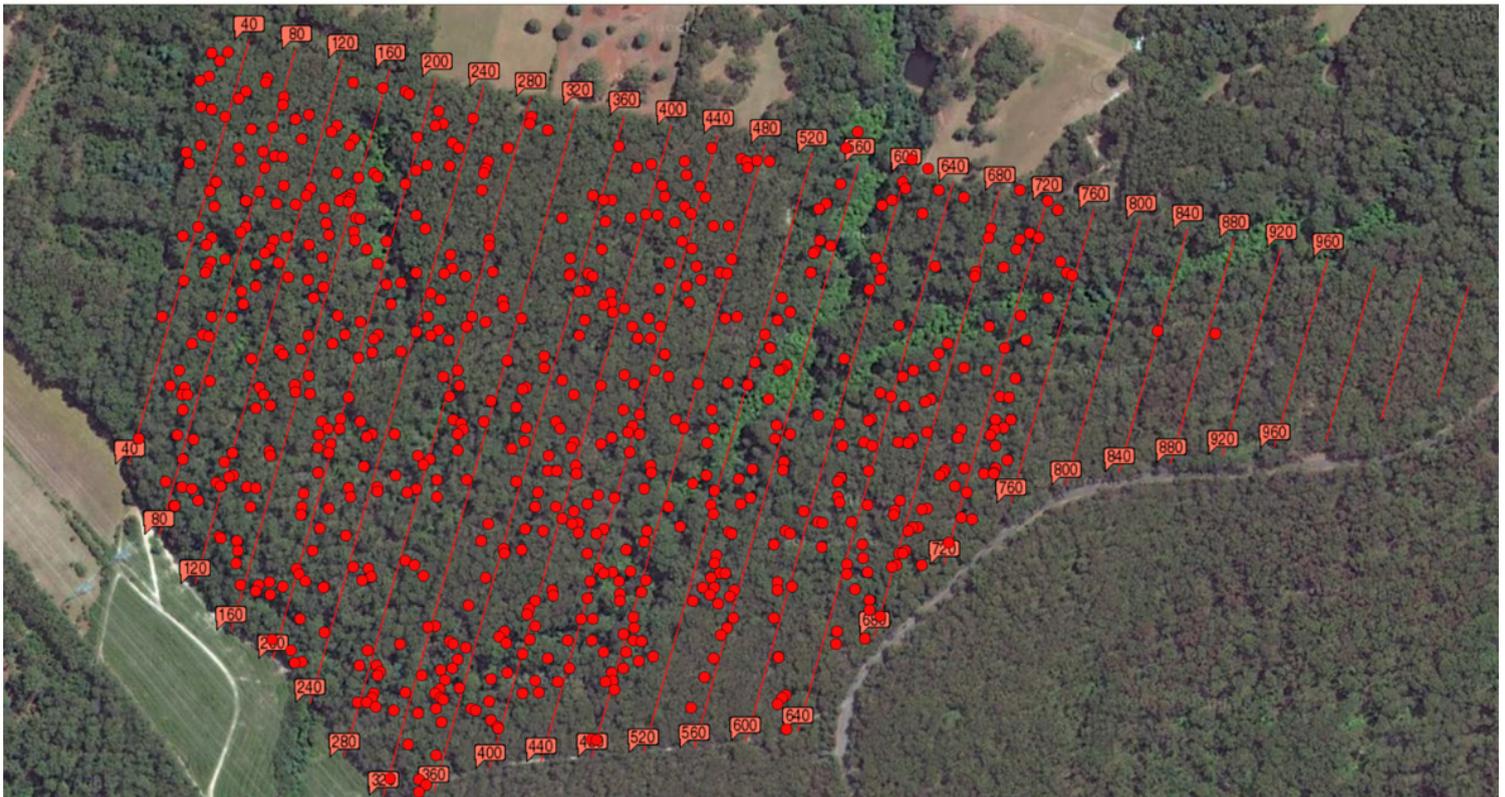
be implemented. Parks Victoria have agreed to organise a meeting with the FOHC to discuss how this might be done. Whilst PV has already organised protection for a few hazardous trees along fire control lines they have not as yet commenced work on protection of the vast bulk of the identified trees that are within the burn area. However, the FOHC has made a start (see photo).

The image below shows the area in question, with the three unnamed tributaries visible as the lighter shades of green amongst the darker green of the eucalypt canopy, with each red dot representing a hollow-bearing/habitat tree. If any members of the public are interested in helping out with the survey or tree protection work please email the Friends on friendsofhoddlescreek@gmail.com

Burn deferred at last minute

Finally, just days before this newsletter was printed, FOHC received a response from DELWP. This stated: "Although the Glenara Road planned burn was scheduled to be delivered in the 2015/16 season, a decision has been made not to carry out this burn in Autumn 2016. We understand that there is a lot of local interest in this burn and significant work has been undertaken by members of the community to identify habitat trees within the burn. In recent years the Department has invested significant resources in researching the effects of planned burns on habitat tree retention, particularly in the Gippsland area.

The East Central Bushfire Risk Landscape (ECBRL) team will investigate whether the data collected in Hoddles Creek - Glenara Road (G55) can feed into this wider research. It is our hope the data can be used to examine the impacts of planned burning on habitat trees in that area."



Aerial view of the proposed burn site, with red dots showing trees identified by FOHC as habitat or hollow bearing trees.

Dieback feedback



Our article on dying trees in the Summer Newsletter prompted a number of thoughtful replies from readers. We thought that you might like to see what they had to say.

‘Re your dieback article. I am not an expert in this, but I too have asked similar questions of people. Dieback of Eucalyptus stands is not an uncommon sight. As you note, there are likely to be multiple factors contributing to this. One additional theory that holds some traction for me is that the trees were gradually exposed to a drying climate over the Millennium drought period. They were stressed, but seemed to be doing OK. When the drought broke they were quickly exposed to much wetter soils for prolonged periods. This additional and sudden stress was the tipping point for some stands of trees, particularly those that may be on the margin of their suitable range.’

‘The cause is probably not just one issue. Some of the photos would be fairly typical sites for *Phytophthora cinnamomi* (PC), but others would be unusual for PC. Another fungi (yes note your comment that PC is probably not a fungi) that causes dieback is *Armillaria luteobubalina*. This fungus commonly has a ring of toadstools around the base of an infected tree in autumn or early winter. The damage can often be seen at other times. The cause could also be abiotic with drought, exceptionally wet soil or very high temperatures all potentially having a role. The drought would provide opportunity for tree roots to utilise areas that were previously too wet and the trees may become reliant on moisture from these areas as other sites became too dry. With a sudden break in the weather and exceptionally wet conditions these sites can again become unsuitable and the recent roots drown before roots in other areas can respond. The tree becomes drought stressed after the rain! It is also possible that the trees were drawing down on starch reserves due to drought/disease etc, and a small change was enough to have the trees fail. If it is *Phytophthora*, the site will be difficult to re-establish with susceptible species but less or non-susceptible species will generally be fine. If *Armillaria*, same species can be used for re-establishment as it only attacks woody species and young trees are not woody! With funds it would be possible to test for the presence of these pathogens but may not be conclusive. For PC you could look on roadside for highly sensitive species such as

Xanthorrea or Banksia. If present in dieback areas probably not PC. Another longer term issue can be the loss of species diversity on the roadside due to lack of opportunity for disturbance species to regenerate. The amount of *Gahnia* in some photos could suggest long unburnt. Diversity in understorey and ground layer species is believed to keep some pathogens in check.’

‘Yes, there is certainly widespread loss of trees due to dieback. The ones I particularly notice around Monbulk (two in my back yard!) are mature messmates. Messmate and Narrowleaf Peppermint are more susceptible to dieback than Mountain Grey Gum - often the messmates die while Mountain Grey Gums in the same stand continue without apparent problems. Another example is the Monbolluck reserve in the main street of Monbulk - there is significant dieback in that stand. I know *Phytophthora* is around - soil tests in Mt Pleasant Rd have shown it to be present, but it's not the only factor. Another factor that seems to be involved is the loss of understorey - trees that die often seem to be the ones in open streets or mown areas. There was a detailed study of dieback across the state in the 1970s and particularly in the Dandenongs, there was thought to be a complex interaction between trees, bell miners, psyllids and climate resulting in dieback. What to do? Try and maintain understorey on public land, resist non-essential removal of mature trees, control stormwater drainage away from native vegetation.’

‘The dieback issue featured in the FOHC (summer 2016/16) newsletter seems similar to what is observed along Macclesfield Road from Beenak Road Yellingbo going south. Messmates and Narrow-leaf Peppermints feature with the Peppermints in greater number. I agree with observations that in a dry period after the drought breaking rains many trees were lost. Macclesfield Road was sealed in early 2000's. Peppermint loss is obvious from Yellingbo to Healesville, not only roadside trees but paddock trees as well. In our property at Mt Toolebewong, Healesville tree loss of the above mentioned plus Mountain Greys, Silvertop Ash and Red and Brown Stringybark seems sporadic. Insect attack may be an issue. Is the tree rot causing mature trees to crash a result of insect attack? Tree loss in Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve is mainly dieback in Eucalyptus camphora caused by hydrological issues.’

Many thanks to everyone who wrote to us on this topic.

Like to join FOHC?

The Friends of Hoddles Creek are always on the lookout for new members to add new ideas, new helpers and new friends to our group. If you'd like to join, simply contact us with your name, address and phone or email details. You can mail these to FOHC, PO Box 298, Yarra Junction, Vic 3797, or email us at friendsofhoddlescreek@gmail.com.

See more at our new website (www.friendsofhoddlescreek.com) or on Facebook – just search ‘Friends of Hoddles Creek’ or ‘FOHC’.

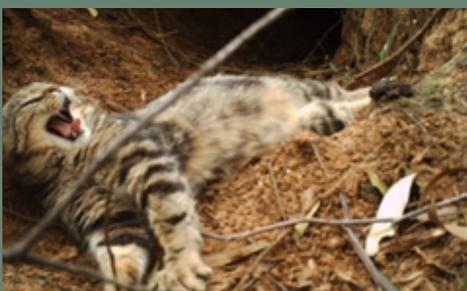


Tale of a wombat burrow

A wombat burrow on a private bushland property proved to be quite a popular spot recently. The burrow was monitored, using a motion-activated infra-red camera for one week, to see whether it was being used and to check the health of wombats in the area. It was being used, but not quite as expected.

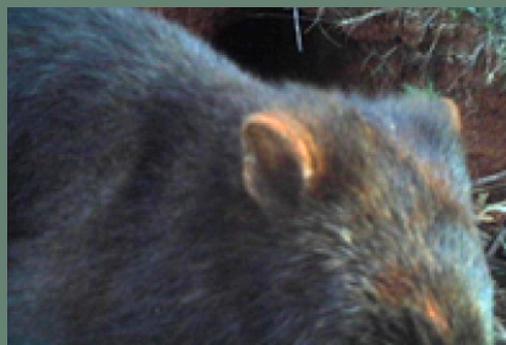


Obviously home to a family of rabbits. Also a food source?



The cat stayed for about 4 hours. There are no cats kept as pets on this, or neighbouring, properties. The burrow is on a privately owned 30 hectare property, bordering Parks Victoria land.

A smaller monitor visited but did not stay.



Finally a wombat!
Healthy
passing by
did not enter the burrow.