

GIPPSLAND FOREST DIALOGUE

Orbost Dialogue Scoping Paper



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THE ORBOST 'HEALTHY FORESTS' DIALOGUE

Our second Gippsland Forest Dialogue will focus on the theme of 'Healthy Forests' and what they might look like for the people, wildlife and landscapes of East Gippsland. In addition to this focus on forest health and what this means to different stakeholders and communities, this Dialogue will also aim to explore fire and forest regeneration, and will work to engage more deeply with the Traditional Custodians of the region. A brief exploration of these topics, with links to further information, is outlined below.

AGENDA

The 'Healthy Forests' Dialogue will be held on 24-25 March in Orbost, Victoria. On Friday 24 March, we will travel to a range of forests around Orbost, including Coulsons Road (near Brodribb Flora Reserve), Mt Buck, Wood Point and South Boundary Rd, hearing from local forest users from a variety of backgrounds at each site. On Saturday, we will convene at the Orbost Exhibition Centre to discuss a range of issues around 'healthy forest'. A copy of the proposed Dialogue agenda can be found [here](#).

BACKGROUND



The Gippsland Forest Dialogue Scoping Dialogue attendees

The first Gippsland Forest Dialogue brought together 20 forestry management experts, academics, conservation scientists and campaigners and other regional stakeholders. The full co-chairs' report from the meeting is [here](#), but the major takeaways from the meeting were:

- Urgency of action required given the current state of Gippsland forests, which are massively impacted by climate, social and biodiversity crises, exacerbated by megafires and unsustainable forest extraction (though there are points of difference in opinion on this issue which need to be resolved through further dialogue).
- A general, palpable frustration with business as usual, and top-down, centralised, siloed management approaches was evident, coupled with enthusiasm around opportunities to find new, more integrated, local and connected ways of working.
- A need for multiple cross-cutting forest functions, uses and values (biodiversity, fire, climate change, water, carbon, timber products, etc.) to be appropriately considered as part of holistic management.
- Desire to explore decentralised / community-based models of forest management set against the need for integrated, whole-of-landscape approaches to tackle big issues (e.g. climate change, fire management, habitat connectivity, etc.).
- Optimism around potential for innovative pilot projects / case studies to develop and refine more sustainable, integrated and scalable forest management approaches.
- Need to voice and listen to different perceptions, experiences and opinions on forest biodiversity and industry / production values, conservation and management, and desire to make progress by establishing better understanding, trust and agreement on this issue.
- Importance of ensuring that additional missing voices and stakeholders are represented in future discussions and dialogues.

ISSUES FOR THE ORBOST 'HEALTHY FORESTS' DIALOGUE

What follows is a brief exploration of some of the issues mooted for discussion and debate at the Orbost Dialogue. If possible, please take the time to click through the links in the 'Further reading' sections and explore the suggested websites, articles, reports and information provided.

Forest health

- The Scoping Dialogue raised the important question of “what is a healthy forest?” and this question is forming the core theme of our second meeting. We will try to seek a definition of 'healthy forest' that encompasses a holistic, all-uses and all-values perspective that reaches far into the future, rather than the compartmentalised, siloed and short-term approaches that may often characterise attempts to define forest health in other forums. It is hoped that this will enable:
 - adaptive thinking from Dialogue participants
 - a meaningful exploration of the different meanings of healthy forest for different people and the identification of points of commonality and difference
 - the generation of innovative ideas on achieving forest health for all values and all users in perpetuity
 - the development of GFD principles for the management of healthy forests.

The framework for this discussion will occur during the field trip on Friday, when participants will be encouraged to fill out 'forest scorecards' at each site. Using an Integrated Management Matrix developed by CFD member and Orbost Co-chair, Ian Cane, the matrix will ask participants to look at the forest and grade it according to water yield, climate change, fire intensity, forest reproductive capacity, wood production value, fuel reduction burning suitability, fire risk management, ecological use of fire, the GLAWAC whole of country plan, biodiversity, support to the community, value for recreation and community health, and, forest connectivity at each site in the present and over time at various scales.

Further Reading

For an example of another type of a forest health measurement matrix, see the Society for Ecological Restoration's 'Recovery Wheel' - a tool designed to assist restoration managers in evaluating the degree to which the ecosystem under treatment is recovering over time.

Traditional Custodians

Among the first insights made by participants during the first Dialogue was the lack of Traditional Custodian representation, and an important part of the Orbost Dialogue is to create more opportunities to engage First Nations peoples in the GFD process and listen and learn from their experiences.

Further Reading

The Gunaikurnai Whole-of-Country plan provides a Whole-of-Country and mob perspective on what some of Gippsland's Traditional Custodians want for the future. Informed by this plan, Gunaikurnai will soon begin negotiating a Natural Resources Agreement (NRA) with the State of Victoria. The NRA will include aspirations relating to use of and access to natural resources, how Gunaikurnai wish to participate in the management of their Country and include agreed strategies to help deliver on their aspirations.



The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation have also produced a Cultural Fire Strategy, which aims to provide direction for On Country burning to occur in a way that is culturally appropriate and effectively managed and reflects Gunaikurnai values across landscapes. A video explaining the strategy is available above.

Fire

Fire and its management will form another focal point at the Orbost Dialogue and participants will be encouraged to reflect on their concerns around this issue, as well as ideas on how to best plan fire management to enhance/achieve healthy and resilient forests. Here are the key insights on this topic from the previous dialogue.

Further Reading

The Joint Fuel Management Program is a state-wide government program that manages fuel on public and private land. "The program integrates a risk-focused bushfire management approach".

Further Reading continued

Safer Together is the State Government's approach to reducing the risks of bushfire in Victoria that "combines stronger community partnerships with the latest science and technology to more effectively target their actions".

'Reducing the effect of planned burns on hollow-bearing trees' is a 2016 DWELP study that aims "to quantify the impact on hollow-bearing trees of exposure to a single instance of planned fire" and "provide evidence-based options for managers seeking to reduce this impact".

'Self-thinning forest understoreys reduce wildfire risk, even in a warming climate' reports on a study that found that "over time, some forests 'thin' themselves and become less likely to burn – and hazard-reduction burning disrupts this process".

'The impact of bushfires on water yield from south-east Australia's ash forests' reports significant reductions in water flow from catchments affected by 2003 fires and indicates water yield reduction from ash forests may be widespread.

Regeneration

Post-fire and post-logging regeneration, and the restoration of thousands of hectares of public land were issues that were not explored in detail at the previous Dialogue, but which require deep consideration, particularly in the East Gippsland context. Questions include how to manage (or not manage) the massive areas of regrowth in the region after the Black Summer and how to restore biodiversity and ecological function to degraded forest landscapes.

Further Reading

Newly discovered landscape traps produce regime shifts in wet forests (pnas.org). This article describes the 'landscape trap' concept, whereby entire landscapes are shifted into, and then maintained in a highly compromised structural and functional state, using the mountain ash forests of southeastern Australia as a case study.

The Silvertop Project is a partnership between Envite Environment and the ANU that looks at managing Silvertop regrowth and restoring eucalyptus tree species diversity to degraded forests with a primary focus on creating habitat for Greater Gliders.



For more information about the
Gippsland Forest Dialogue visit:

www.gfd.org.au



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