



Protecting Victoria's state forests and native wildlife

Regulatory Priorities

2022–2023

**CONSERVATION
REGULATOR VICTORIA**

Regulatory priorities

2022 – 2023

Traditional Owners acknowledgment

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices. We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.



Report produced by the Conservation Regulator
PO Box 500, East Melbourne, Victoria 8002
Telephone 136 186 conservationregulator.vic.gov.au

Disclaimer

This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.



© The State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2022

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. You are free to re-use the work under that licence, on the condition that you credit the State of Victoria as author. The licence does not apply to any images, photographs or branding, including the Victorian Coat of Arms, the Victorian Government logo and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) logo. To view a copy of this licence, visit creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
ISSN 2652-6891 - Online (pdf/word)

Contents

Foreword	3
How we set our regulatory priorities	4
Trends we are seeing	5
State-wide regulatory priorities	6
Contact us	12

Accessibility

If you would like to receive this publication in an alternative format, please telephone the DELWP Customer Contact Centre on 136 186, email customer.service@delwp.vic.gov.au, or via the National Relay Service on 133 677 www.relayservice.com.au. This document is also available on the internet at www.delwp.vic.gov.au

Foreword

Almost 40 per cent of Victoria is public land, with approximately 8 million hectares of forests, parks and reserves. These wonderful environments are home to many of our native species and habitats which are under sustained pressure from threats such as climate change and habitat degradation. Victoria's environment is fundamental to our wellbeing, and it has been great to see more Victorians using public land for recreation over the last few years.

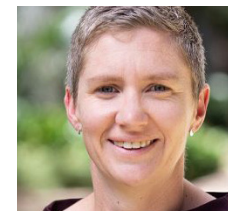
The Conservation Regulator plays an important role in protecting our forests, parks and reserves for future generations. We are responsible for regulating timber harvesting, biodiversity, fire prevention and public land-use.

Our aim is to make sure everyone has safe and equitable access to our state forests and natural assets, while also protecting them for future generations to enjoy. We focus on how public land is being used, how wildlife is being treated and how to prevent harm.

Each year, we undertake a risk assessment to determine our key regulatory priorities for the year ahead. Elevated public land use, population growth and climate change remain key driving factors of environmental decline, influencing our risks and actions into the future.

More people are using public land for camping and recreation in Victoria than ever before and at the same time Victoria is becoming warmer and drier.

The impacts of these pressures were highlighted in the State of the Environment: Biodiversity Update 2021 Report. The report found that major threats from invasive species, bushfires, climate change and habitat loss are causing a decline in Victoria's ecosystems. For us as a regulator this means responding to the competing demands for the environmental values we are trying to protect. We need to understand the increased threats and demand for access to public land for the effective prioritisation of our resources.



Kate Gavens

Chief Conservation Regulator

At the Conservation Regulator, we will continue to use data and intelligence to direct our effort to where it will have the most impact. We will use a range of approaches to address key harms caused by non-compliance, from engagement and education to investigation and enforcement action. Collaboration with our key regulatory partners and the community is central to these activities. We will also continue to contribute to key government legislation reform that enables us to be an effective regulator.

I look forward to continuing our important work to conserve and protect our environment and wildlife for future generations.



How we set our regulatory priorities

While we work across all of our regulatory responsibilities, identifying our regulatory priorities helps us to focus our effort on what is most important. It also helps our community and stakeholders to understand what we consider to be a priority.

We use a data and intelligence driven approach to determine the most significant risks to the environment, which form our priorities. We do this by:

- Collecting, collating and analysing data
- Identifying new and emerging trends
- Conducting research
- Consulting with internal and external stakeholders
- Working with our regulatory partners

We have identified a number of driving factors and challenges that continue to impact on the long term health of our natural environment.

Trends we are seeing



COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic created lasting changes to the way Victorians live and spend their leisure time. It has been fantastic to see so many Victorians out enjoying our natural environment with unprecedented visitation across public land. We expect this to continue into 2022-2023, particularly in public land closer to urban areas.



Off-road vehicle use

The rising popularity of off-road vehicles is driving high demand for trail bikes and other all-terrain vehicles in Victoria. Unfortunately, the Conservation Regulator has seen an increase in illegal vehicle use associated with these trends that are negatively impacting the biodiversity values of our state forests. This includes off-road illegal trail bike riding and four-wheel driving.



Bushfire risk and recovery

The significant 2019–20 bushfires burned through 1.5 million hectares of Victoria's forests, almost all of which was native forest and important wildlife habitat. Native flora and fauna will continue to be at risk during the slow regeneration of lost forest and are more vulnerable to future bushfires. We play an important role in protecting and preserving these forest values and remaining wildlife refuges as our forests recover.



Impacts on wildlife

Despite restricted pathways for the import and export of wildlife due to international travel restrictions, there has been a global boom in online wildlife trade over the past few years. We know the pandemic drove an increase in the demand for exotic pets globally with Australian wildlife fetching high prices. Locally, demand for keeping wildlife as pets has continued to increase. There can also be challenges in managing conflicts between wildlife and human activity which will remain a focus for the Conservation Regulator where there is a risk of harm to native wildlife.



Demand for firewood

Firewood supply continues to be constrained and this is expected to continue in the future. Major bushfires and economic pressures including increased home heating costs are expected to drive continued pressure on Victoria's firewood stocks. The illegal take of firewood continues to be an issue damaging wildlife habitat and culturally significant sites.



State-wide regulatory priorities

The Conservation Regulator's state-wide regulatory priorities for 2022-2023 are:



Illegal campfires



Illegal possession of wildlife



Illegal commercial timber harvesting in state forests



Illegal take of firewood



Illegal vehicle use



Illegal campfires

Illegal campfires continue to be a major and avoidable cause of bushfires in Victoria.

More people are using public land for camping in Victoria than ever before and at the same time Victoria is becoming warmer and drier. This increases the risk of bushfires, with potentially devastating effects on communities and the state's natural assets, particularly over the Christmas and New Year period. Because of the increasing risk factors and the devastating consequences of bushfires, the Conservation Regulator has a strong focus on unauthorised and unsafe campfires.

The Conservation Regulator informs and educates the public, patrols public land in partnership with Forest Fire Management Victoria and takes enforcement action to reduce the risk of bushfires and protect our communities.



The Conservation Regulator regulates campfires in state forests, so campfires don't become bushfires





Illegal possession of wildlife

The Conservation Regulator protects our native wildlife to support their conservation

The conservation and sustainability of wildlife is under increasing pressure from threats, including habitat loss, introduced pests, illegal take from the wild, wildlife trafficking, and climate change.

The Conservation Regulator is committed to the protection of wildlife, by regulating the sustainable use of and access to wildlife. We administer wildlife permits, licences and authorities, which balance the welfare and sustainability of wildlife. We have a specific focus on illegal possession where welfare and sustainability issues exist. The Conservation Regulator will respond swiftly and intently to all allegations of wildlife crime.



Illegal possession, treatment and trafficking pose a significant threat to our native species





Illegal commercial timber harvesting in state forests

Lawful timber harvesting is permitted in Victoria

Timber harvesting in state forests is permitted in Victoria but must be compliant with the law.

Commercial timber harvesting is regulated in accordance with the Code of Practice for Timber Production (the Code) including the Management Standards and Procedures for Timber Harvesting Operations in Victoria's state forests.

The regulatory framework for timber harvesting exists to ensure that timber harvesting activities are done in a way that is compatible with the conservation of environmental, social and cultural values, so they are protected for future generations.

The Conservation Regulator will continue to monitor and enforce timber harvesting legal obligations focusing on areas of high environmental risk.

In 2021, the Victorian Parliament passed the *Forests Legislation Amendment (Compliance and Enforcement) Act 2021*, which amended several laws to strengthen regulatory powers regarding timber harvesting. These changes are designed to create clearer, more enforceable rules for timber harvesting, and took effect on 1 March 2022.



The Conservation Regulator regulates timber harvesting to protect our forests



Illegal take of firewood

The Conservation Regulator is committed to detecting and punishing the illegal take of firewood in commercial quantities from state forests

Tree hollows and woody debris provide critical nesting, sheltering and foraging sites for a range of threatened bird, mammal and reptile species, including the Leadbeater's Possum, Powerful Owl, Brush-tailed Phascogale and many others. The illegal take of firewood for personal use or in commercial quantities leads to the destruction of this important habitat.

Preventing the destruction of habitat is critically important at a time when wildlife populations and ecosystems are still recovering from bushfire and climate change is leading to hotter and drier conditions.

The Conservation Regulator targets illegal firewood collection through surveillance and enforcement action, while also educating the community about the legal ways to source firewood and the harm caused by illegal operators.



Illegal firewood collection is causing the loss of important habitats including hollow logs and dead trees, which provide critical nesting, sheltering and foraging sites to threatened species





Illegal vehicle use

Driving or riding vehicles off formed roads and tracks or on closed roads in state forests is illegal

Off road driving is popular in Victoria and there is a big network of formed roads and tracks open to the public in state forests, parks and reserves. However, if these vehicles go off these roads and tracks, the use of these vehicles has the potential to cause serious damage to the environment, cultural sites, and to restrict access to public land. Vehicles must not drive or ride on natural terrain, walking trails, cycling trails, closed roads, restricted access areas, in streams or on informal single tracks.

The Conservation Regulator partners with community groups to support legal activity, and with co-regulators to conduct frequent patrols in state forests. Surveillance technology is also used to identify illegal off-road driving and riding.



Illegal off-road vehicle use causes significant damage to soil, wildlife habitat and waterway health





Contact us

There are several ways you can communicate with us, whether you have seen something that could be a breach in compliance, to seek advice, find information or share an idea.

 Visit us online at www.conservationregulator.vic.gov.au

 DELWP Customer Contact Centre 136 186

 Email us at conservationregulator@delwp.vic.gov.au

 Report suspected wildlife trafficking
Crime Stoppers Victoria 1800 333 000 or
www.crimestoppersvic.com.au/report-a-crime

 Report potential timber harvesting compliance issues at
www.forestsandreserves.vic.gov.au/forest-management/forest-reports

 If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment,
contact us through the National Relay Service on 133 677
or visit www.relayservice.gov.au

 Follow us on Twitter @conservationreg

