

Environment and Heritage

The North East region has great environmental diversity, ranging from the drier Box Ironbark communities of the plains to tall ash forests and the alpine herb fields of the high country along the Great Dividing Range. The region's rugged ranges and picturesque valleys have numerous places of aesthetic significance valued by the community, as well as many places of historical importance. The region contains a number of national, wilderness and State parks, including Alpine, Mount Buffalo, Burrowa-Pine Mountain, Chiltern Box-Ironbark, Wabba and Mount Lawson.

The CAR Reserve system

The North East RFA creates a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve system based on the nationally agreed criteria for the protection of biodiversity, old growth and wilderness. The criteria include reservation of at least 15 per cent of each forest type as existed before European arrival, at least 60 per cent of old growth forest and 90 per cent or more of high quality wilderness.

The RFA:

- Satisfies the criteria as far as is practicable on public land.
- Adds 174,000 hectares to the reserve system, an increase of 42 per cent. This brings the total area in reserves to 592,000 hectares or some 26 per cent of the entire region.

A significant addition to the reserve system is over 2700 hectares of the upper Wongungarra catchment with its high quality stands of old growth, flora and fauna habitat and important Spotted Tree Frog population.

Other important areas set aside for conservation include portions of the Stanley Plateau and Barambogie Range.

The reserve system comprises:

dedicated reserves – reserves requiring a parliamentary decision to revoke their status. National Parks, State Parks and Flora and Fauna Reserves are examples of dedicated reserves;

informal reserves – areas reserved under other secure tenure or management arrangements. Special Protection Zones (SPZ) which have been set aside for specific and identified conservation purposes in State forest in accordance with the Forest Management Plan are examples of informal reserves; and

protection through prescription – for situations where protection of the conservation value within reserves is impracticable as a result of the nature of the value, for example protection by prescription afforded by the Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production.

Biodiversity

Of the 58 Ecological Vegetation Classes identified in the North East, 46 are considered endangered, vulnerable or rare. The 12 EVCs not falling into this category are represented in the CAR Reserve system at levels meeting or exceeding the criterion of 15 per cent.

Many of those that are vulnerable or rare are found mainly on private land, and targets cannot be met on public land. Some, however, are found in Special Management Zones - areas outside the CAR Reserve system but where special management conditions apply in order to protect biodiversity and other values.

Rare and threatened flora

Of the around 2,000 species of vascular (higher order) plants recorded for the North East region, 166 species are of conservation significance with at least 24 rated as critically endangered. The reserve system has been designed to include most of the significant populations of these species where they occur primarily on public land.

Rare and threatened fauna

The assessment identified 34 species of mammals, reptiles, birds and frogs in the North East which are rare or threatened. These include the Long-footed Potoroo, discovered in the North East in 1995, and the Spotted Tree Frog, which is effectively restricted to a small number of populations in North East Victoria and the Central Highlands.

The North-East RFA:

- establishes a large, consolidated Special Management Area to protect Long-footed Potoroo core habitat in excess of 17,500 hectares;
- incorporates detailed measures for the protection of the Spotted Tree Frog;
- includes in the CAR Reserve system large areas of undisturbed forest, including significant stands of old growth, ensuring important habitat for a range of hollow-dependent species such as the Yellow-bellied Glider and Gang Gang Cockatoo;
- includes habitat for 125 breeding pairs of the Powerful Owl and 100 breeding pairs of the Sooty Owl.

Old-growth

About 21 per cent (261,000 hectares) of the region's forested public land has been identified as old-growth, occurring in 14 EVCs in the region, with six accounting for 93 per cent of the total area.

Old growth for all EVCs has been reserved to the required levels under the JANIS criteria through a combination of formal, informal and prescriptive protections.

Wilderness

An assessment of wilderness for Eastern Victoria in 1996 identified four areas of high quality wilderness within the North East - Wabba, Dartmouth, Yarrarabulla Creek and Razor/Viking. Ninety five per cent of the total area delineated in the assessment of Eastern Victorian forests as significant for high wilderness quality is protected in the existing reserve system, thereby satisfying the national reserve criteria.

World Heritage

The World Heritage Assessment expert panel identified five potential sub-themes in Victoria which warrant further investigation. Two are potentially relevant to the North East region:

- areas with outstanding examples of *Eucalyptus*-dominated vegetation associated with the Eastern Forests of Victoria; and
- parts of the Australian marginal swells associated with the Eastern Highlands.

Both governments have agreed to participate in the World Heritage assessment of the Australia-wide Eucalypt theme potentially leading to a World Heritage nomination. Both governments agreed that nomination involving areas in the North East if required will come from within the CAR Reserve System.

Cultural Heritage

Places of community attachment include numerous waterfalls, alpine huts, a racecourse, a country hall and, lakes, walks and community recreation reserves.

Cultural heritage studies identified 165 non-Indigenous places of indicative national estate significance covering aesthetic, historic and social values. Historic places provide an insight to an intense history of landuse and settlement, and its folk history associations with the 'man from Snowy River' and Ned Kelly. Sites associated with people and settlement include early gold digging settlements, forest camp sites used for migrants and prisoners of war, and sites associated with bushranging and Chinese diggings. Scattered throughout the forests are also places associated with the history of alpine grazing, harvesting timber, providing hydro electricity, wildfire, transport, conservation and recreation.

Recognising that many places of Aboriginal significance exist in the North East, and having regard to the wishes of the North East Aboriginal communities, a program of consultation and field work was undertaken with regional Aboriginal communities to develop an ongoing participative Aboriginal heritage management system.

