

LEADBEATER'S POSSUM DETECTION REPORT

**Bell Clear Creek, Thomson River
Forest Reserve**

480-504-0030 'Bawl'



**Report on the detection of a Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*)
within VicForests scheduled logging coupe 480-504-0030 'Bawl'.**

Abstract

Patches of suitable habitat within VicForests scheduled logging coupe 480-504-0030 'Bawl' were actively surveyed to determine presence/absence of the Critically Endangered Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*). Leadbeater's Possum (LBP) was identified during this survey within the 'Bawl' coupe. This investigation concludes that VicForests have failed to identify LBP within the 'Bawl' coupe and have scheduled logging in confirmed habitat for the critically endangered LBP. The methodology employed, the results of the investigation and the report's conclusions and recommendations are detailed below.

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Wildlife of The Central Highlands Inc.

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Date of report: 28/11/2020

Introduction:

The Forest Protection Survey Program (FPSP) has not conducted surveys in VicForests coupe 480-504-0030 'Bawl'. It is therefore unlikely that VicForests has conducted any pre-harvest surveys in the coupe, however the 'Bawl' coupe remains on the current VicForests Timber Release Plan, and additional coupes and driveways have been proposed on the August 2020 TRP in the surrounding area.

Location details:

This investigation was undertaken within the Thomson River Forest Reserve off Thomson Valley Road, within forest in coupe 480-504-0030 'Bawl'.

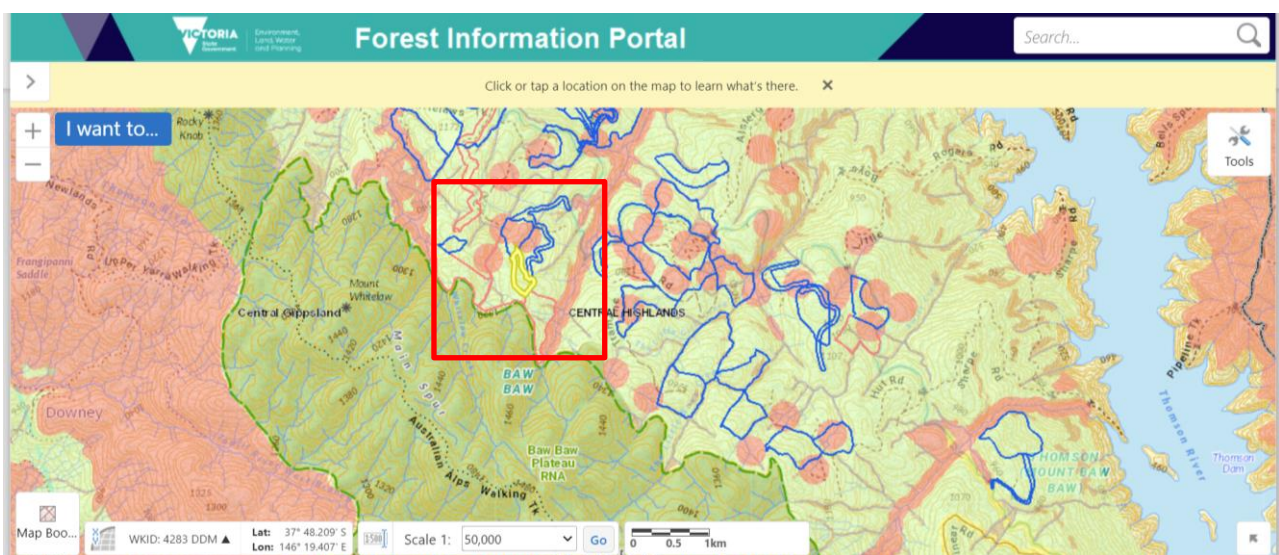


Figure i. Map showing the location of the logging coupe investigated (in red box) in the context of the Thomson Valley Forest area, image taken as a screen shot from the Forest Information Portal on 28/11/2020: [Forest Information Portal \(ffm.vic.gov.au\)](http://ffm.vic.gov.au)

Method

Method used: Active Search 19/11/2020

- Field surveys were undertaken within VicForests scheduled logging coupe 480-504-0030 to identify potential LBP habitat and nesting trees.
- Patches of forest within the coupe was actively searched at night (19/11/20) with the assistance of a thermal imaging camera and red spotlights.
- Once spotted on the thermal imaging camera, red spotlights were used to light up the animal and video evidence was attained using a Sony camera.
- Upon successfully attaining video footage of the possum (approx 12:57 am), the camera was panned over to a GPS to provide the coordinates of the detection location and proof of location.
- The survey was concluded shortly after attaining the footage of the Leadbeater's Possum.

Results

Summary

1. This investigation detected Leadbeater's Possum within VicForests scheduled logging coupe 480-504-0030 'Bawl'.
2. Video evidence of the Leadbeater's Possum was captured along with the GPS coordinates for proof of location.
3. VicForests has failed to identify this Leadbeater's Possum and thus has planned to construct logging operations within critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum habitat in coupe 480-504-0030.

Results 1.

Figures 1(a-b), are screenshots captured from the attached video footage proving the identification of the possum to be *Gymnobelideus leadbeateri* (Leadbeater's Possum).

Figure 1c is a screenshot from the attached video footage detailing the GPS coordinates (and thus detection location) of the Leadbeater's Possum detection.

Results 2

Figure 2 is a map of the Leadbeater's Possum detection location as well as the location buffered with the indicative 200m and scientifically recommended 1km protective buffers and other relevant features.

Results 3.

Figure 3, (attached) is a video file excerpt of the Leadbeater's Possum detection and proof of location.

Results 4.

Figure 4, (attached) is a GPX file containing the waypoint which was marked in the field at the time of the Leadbeater's Possum detection.

Results 1



Figure 1a. Still image of a Leadbeater's Possum captured at approximately 12:57 am (19/11/20); Location: 0436226 5817727 (GDA / MGA Zone 55H); Attained as a screenshot from attached video footage.



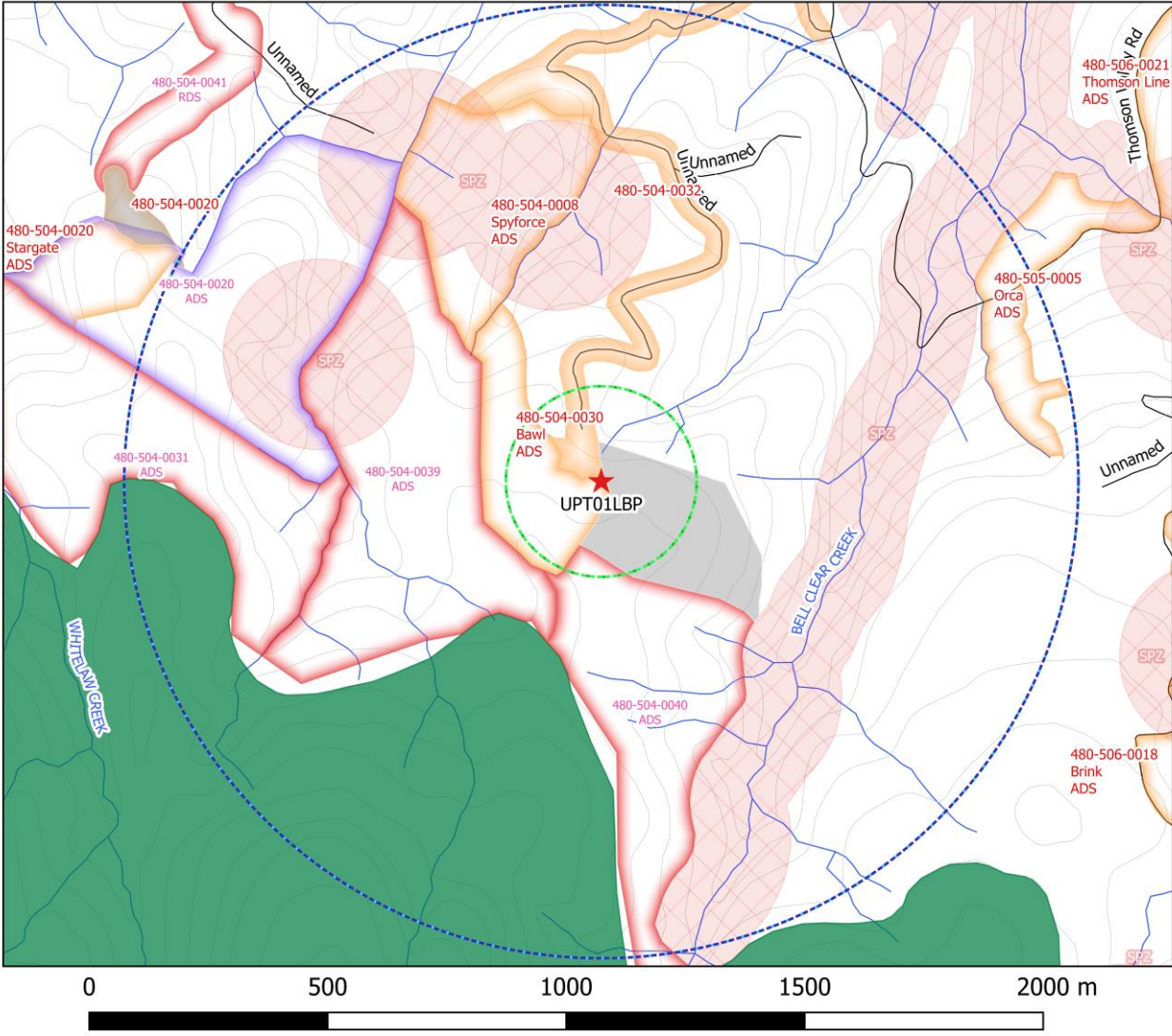
Figure 1b. Still image of a Leadbeater's Possum captured at approximately 12:57 am (19/11/20); Location: 0436226 5817727 (GDA / MGA Zone 55H); Attained as a screenshot from attached video footage.



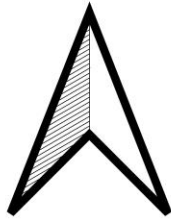
Figure 1c. Still image of the GPS coordinates (and thus detection location) captured at approximately 12:57 am (19/11/20); Location: 0436226 5817727 (GDA / MGA Zone 55H); Attained as a screenshot from attached video footage.

Results 2. Figure 2

Bell Clear Creek Leadbeater's Possum (LBP) Detection on 19/11/2020; Indicative 200m LBP Buffer; Recommended 1km LBP Buffer; VicForests Timber Release Plan (TRP) December 2019; VicForests Proposed TRP August 2020; Forest Management Zoning (FMZ): Special Protection Zones (SPZ); Watercourses, Contours & Roads; Parks & Reserves



Leadbeater's Possum	Proposed August 2020
★ Leadbeater's Possum Detection	■ Proposed Amended Coupe
□ Indicative 200m LBP Buffer	■ Proposed New Coupe
□ Recommended 1km LBP Buffer	■ Proposed Driveway
Forest Management Zoning (FMZ)	Other
■ Special Protection Zone (SPZ)	— Contours
VicForests TRP	— Roads
■ Approved December 2019	— Watercourses
	■ Parks and Reserves


 Created by Blake Nisbet
 WOTCH
 28/11/2020
 QGIS
 GDA / MGA Zone 55 H

Discussion

This investigation has revealed that VicForests has failed to identify the presence of threatened species throughout pre-harvest surveys and are planning to conduct logging & roading operations within the habitat of a critically endangered species. VicForests has also proposed new coupes and driveways on the proposed August 2020 TRP within the habitat for this Leadbeater's Possum.

Mandatory Prescriptions

It is mandatory for VicForests, the Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning and any other organizations undertaking timber harvesting operations within state forest of Victoria to comply with all prescriptions outlined within the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014 (the Code).

The following excerpts show specific prescriptions within the Planning Standards for timber harvesting operations in Victoria's State forests 2014, Appendix 5 to the Management Standards and Procedures for timber harvesting operations in Victoria's State forests 2014, a document within the Code, that must be enforced by DELWP following the detection of this LBP.

Excerpt 1. from page 20 of the "Planning Standards", under subheading: Table 3 Fixed FMZ rules for fauna.

4.2 Fauna – fixed zoning:

Table 3. Establish and maintain SPZs of 200 m radius centred on each verified Leadbeater's Possum colony found since 1998 that is not located within forest areas severely impacted by the 2009 wildfire (Exclude colonies within Fire Severity classes 1 and 2).

4.3 Fauna - detection based zoning

Table 4. Establish a SPZ of 200 m radius centred on each verified Leadbeater's Possum colony.

The Department (DELWP) must enforce the mandatory 200m LBP buffer with a matter of urgency before any timber harvesting operations occur at coupes 480-504-0030 & 480-504-0032 (Roadline) in the Thomson River Forest Reserve.

Excerpt 2. from page 34 of "The Code", under subheading: 2.2 Environmental Values in State Forests.

<p>2.2.2 Conservation of Biodiversity</p> <p>Mandatory Actions</p> <p>Addressing biodiversity conservation risks considering scientific knowledge</p> <p>2.2.2.2 The precautionary principle must be applied to the conservation of biodiversity values. The application of the precautionary principle will be consistent with relevant monitoring and research that has improved the understanding of the effects of forest management on forest ecology and conservation values.</p> <p>2.2.2.3 The advice of relevant experts and relevant research in conservation biology and flora and fauna management must be considered when planning and conducting timber harvesting operations.</p>
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In order to apply with the precautionary principle, VicForests should be adhering to the relevant scientific advice on protecting conservation values, which in coupe 480-504-0030 would include the establishment of a 1km LBP buffer (Figure 2) and additional protective measures as recommended by WOTCH below:

Recommended Prescriptions by Scientists at the Australian National University (ANU)

The following prescriptions relevant to this report were recommended by David Lindenmayer, David Blair, Lachlan McBurney and Sam Banks from the Australian National University in their paper produced in July 2013; New Restoration Forest Management Prescriptions to conserve Leadbeater's Possum and Rebuild the cover of Ecologically Mature Forest in the Central Highlands of Victoria.

Prescription 2 – Protection of recorded locations –

2.1 All locations where Leadbeater's Possum has been recorded present in the past 15 years will be protected by a 1 km buffer from which logging (both clearfell and thinnings) is excluded.

Prescription 3 – Protection of Hollow-bearing Trees –

3.1 Each hollow-bearing tree (whether living or dead) will be surrounded by a buffer of unlogged forest measuring 100 m in radius. - 3.3 All trees 100 or more years old should be protected and surrounded by a buffer of unlogged forest measuring 100 m in radius.

Prescription 5 – Protection of Streamside Buffers –

5.1.1 Streamside buffers will be widened to a minimum of 100 m either side of a stream, whether permanent or temporary/seasonal.

Conclusion

- This report details the detection of a critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum occupying forest within VicForests logging coupe 480-504-0030, Thomson River Forest Reserve.
- VicForests has been unsuccessful in identifying this Leadbeater's Possum during pre-harvest surveys, most likely due to a non-existent survey effort.
- This report concludes that VicForest, through failing to identify this Leadbeater's Possum, has planned to conduct logging operations within critical habitat of the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum.

Recommendations

- DELWP must refrain VicForests from commencing timber harvesting operations within scheduled logging coupe 480-504-0030 'Bawl' and roadline 480-504-0032 that falls within the prescribed 200m Special Protection Zone (SPZ) around this detection as seen in Figure 2.
- VicForests should adhere to the relevant scientific advice for the species including the establishment of a 1km LBP buffer around the detection as seen in Figure 2 as to apply with the precautionary principle.
- The logging coupe 480-504-0030 'Bawl' should be removed from VicForests Timber Release Plan as this area is of high significance to the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum.
- The proposed additions/changes to the TRP in the surrounding area need to be thoroughly surveyed for Leadbeater's Possum to ensure critical habitat is protected.



We respectfully acknowledge the Taungurung, Wurundjeri and Gunaikurnai Elders past, present and emerging, the Traditional Custodians who have never ceded ownership of the land on which we live, travel, work and play.