

LEADBEATER'S POSSUM DETECTION REPORT

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

480-505-0017 'Seal'



**Report on the detection of a Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*)
within VicForests scheduled logging coupe 480-505-0017 'Seal'.**

Abstract

A remote-sensor camera was setup within VicForests scheduled logging coupe 480-505-0017 'Seal' to determine presence/absence of the Critically Endangered Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*). Leadbeater's Possum (LBP) was identified during this survey within the 'Seal' coupe. This investigation concludes that VicForests have failed to identify LBP within the 'Seal' 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.

Date of Investigation: 27/01/2021 – 12/03/2021

Date of report: 21/03/2021

Location details:

This investigation was undertaken within the Thomson River Forest Reserve off Thomson Valley Road, within a patch of Cool Temperate Rainforest in coupe 480-505-0017 'Seal'.

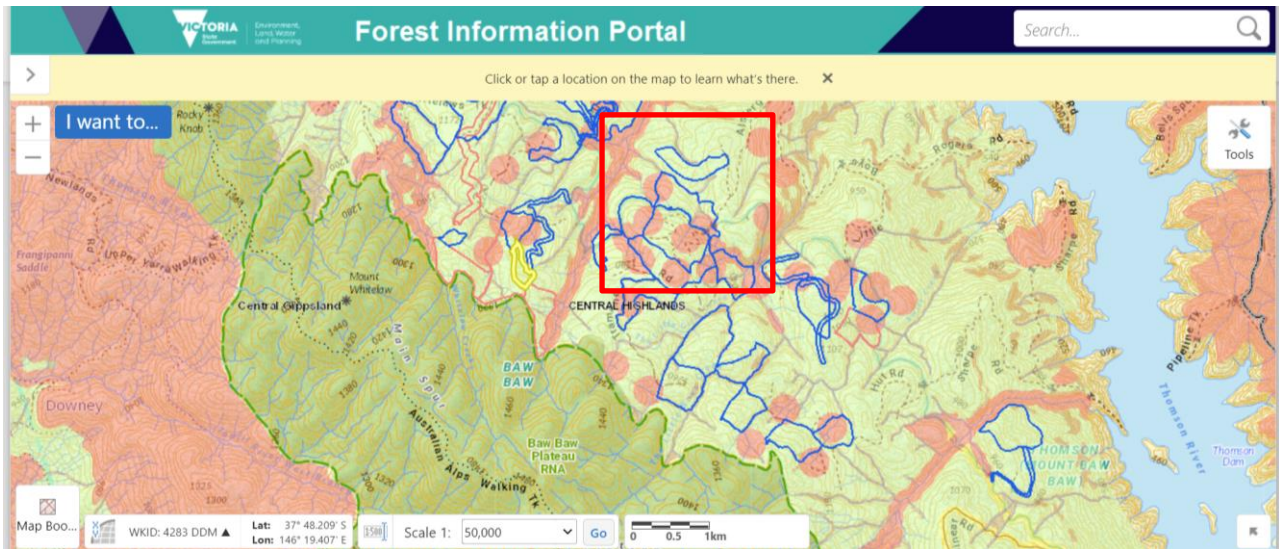


Figure i. Map showing the location of the logging coupe investigated (in red box) in the context of the Thomson Valley Forest area, image taken as a screen shot from the Forest Information Portal on 28/11/2020: [Forest Information Portal \(ffm.vic.gov.au\)](http://ffm.vic.gov.au)

Method

Method used: Remote-Sensor Camera Trap

- A remote-sensor Reconyx camera was setup within a patch of suitable habitat in VicForests coupe 480-505-0017 on 27/01/2021.
- Creamed honey was placed within a baiting station which was setup in front of the remote-sensor camera
- A short video was filmed showing the camera-trap setup and the GPS coordinates for proof of location
- The camera and baiting station was later retrieved on 12/03/2021
- The SD card was then analysed to determine the presence/absence of LBP

Results

Summary

1. This investigation detected Leadbeater's Possum within VicForests scheduled logging coupe 480-505-0017 'Seal'.
2. Photographs of Leadbeater's Possum were captured on multiple survey nights from the remote-sensor camera.
3. Video footage was taken of the camera-trap setup along with GPS coordinates for proof of location.
4. 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 480-505-0017.

Results 1.

Figures 1(a-d), are photographs of *Gymnobelideus leadbeateri* (Leadbeater's Possum) captured from the remote-sensor camera on multiple survey nights.

Figure 1e 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 taken on 27/01/2021 showing the investigation location, camera-trap setup and GPS coordinates for proof of location.

Results 4.

A GPX file containing the waypoint for the camera-trap setup location, marked on 27/01/2021.

Results 1



Figure 1a. Still image of a Leadbeater's Possum captured at approximately 03:52 am (16/02/21); Location: 0438426 5818682 (GDA / MGA Zone 55H).



Figure 1b. Still image of a Leadbeater's Possum captured at approximately 05:06 am (24/02/21); Location: 0438426 5818682 (GDA / MGA Zone 55H).



Figure 1c. Still image of a Leadbeater's Possum captured at approximately 05:06 am (24/02/21); Location: 0438426 5818682 (GDA / MGA Zone 55H).



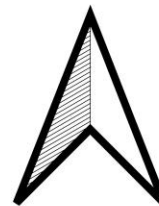
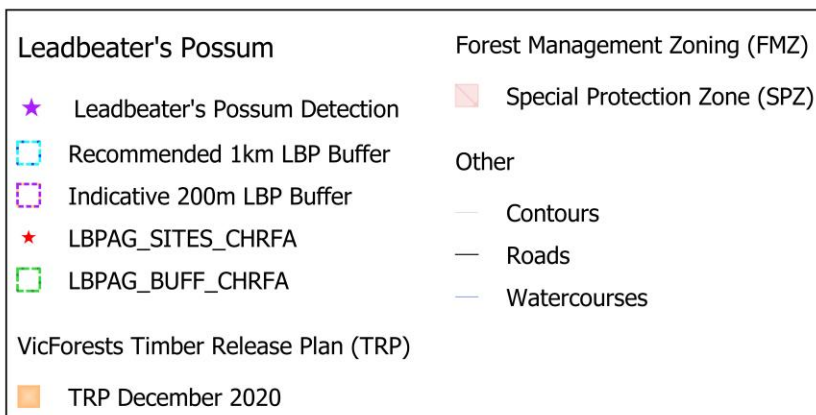
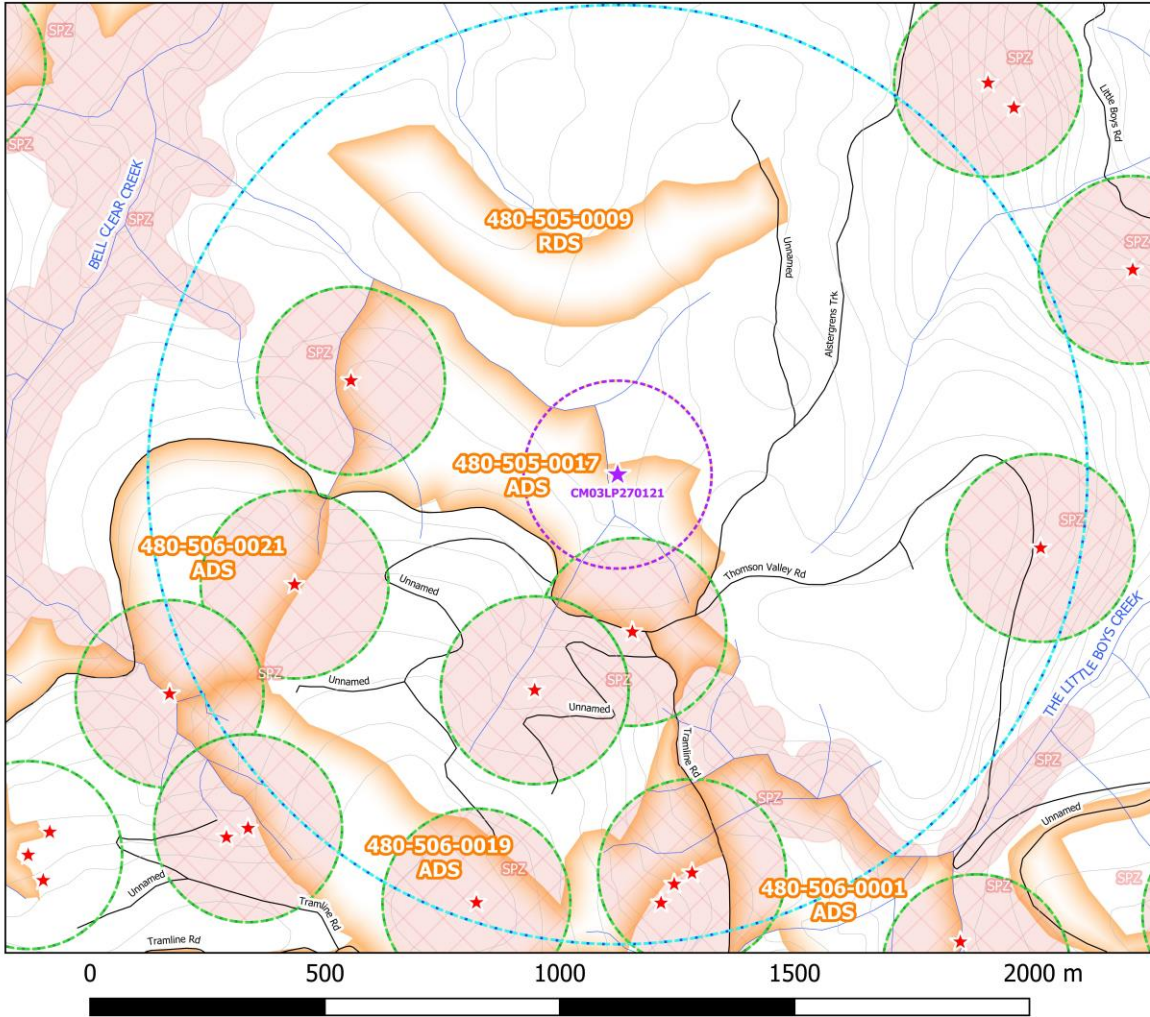
Figure 1d. Still image of a Leadbeater's Possum captured at approximately 03:42 am (07/03/21); Location: 0438426 5818682 (GDA / MGA Zone 55H).



Figure 1e. Screenshot from the attached video (Figure 3) showing the camera-trap frame during daylight hours. Location: 0438426 5818682 (GDA / MGA Zone 55H).

Results 2

Bell Clear Creek Leadbeater's Possum (LBP) Detection on multiple dates (16/02/2021 - 07/03/2021); Indicative 200m LBP Buffer; Recommended 1km LBP Buffer; Existing LBPAG Sites & Buffers; VicForests Timber Release Plan (TRP) December 2020; Forest Management Zoning (FMZ): Special Protection Zones (SPZ); Watercourses, Contours & Roads



Created by Blake Nisbet
 WOTCH
 13/03/2021
 QGIS
 GDA / MGA Zone 55 H

Figure 2. Map showing the location of the Leadbeater's Possum detection in VicForests coupe 480-505-0017 'Seal', the indicative 200m and scientifically recommended 1km buffers around the detection site.

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 operations within the habitat of a critically endangered species.

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 coupe 480-505-0017 in the Thomson River Forest Reserve.

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

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|---|
| <p>2.2.2 Conservation of Biodiversity</p> <p>Mandatory Actions</p> <p><i>Addressing biodiversity conservation risks considering scientific knowledge</i></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> |
|---|

In order to apply with the precautionary principle, VicForests should be adhering to the relevant scientific advice on protecting conservation values, which in coupe 480-505-0017 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 480-505-0017, Thomson River Forest Reserve.
- VicForests has been unsuccessful in identifying this Leadbeater's Possum during pre-harvest surveys.
- 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 480-505-0017 'Seal' 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 480-505-0017 'Seal' should be removed from VicForests Timber Release Plan as this area is of high significance to the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum.



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.