



Leadbeater's Possum Detection Report

Coupe 300-530-0003 'Knots'

Monda Road, Toolangi State Forest



Leadbeater's Possum habitat within coupe 300-530-0003

Report on a Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) detection at VicForests active logging coupe 300-530-0003, Toolangi State Forest.

Abstract

Forest in and adjacent to VicForests active logging coupe 300-530-0003 was investigated to assess presence/absence of the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum. WOTCH surveyors detected a Leadbeater's Possum. The investigation shows that VicForests has scheduled logging operations in areas of forest currently inhabited by Leadbeater's Possum. The methodology, results and conclusions are detailed below.

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Introduction

VicForests logging coupe 300-530-0003 'Knots' is listed on the VicForests Timber Release Plan approved in September 2021. The coupe is located on Monda Road in Toolangi State Forest and contains Leadbeater's Possum Zone 1A Habitat, which is the subject of a recent WOTCH report. WOTCH actively surveyed the coupe for presence of the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum.

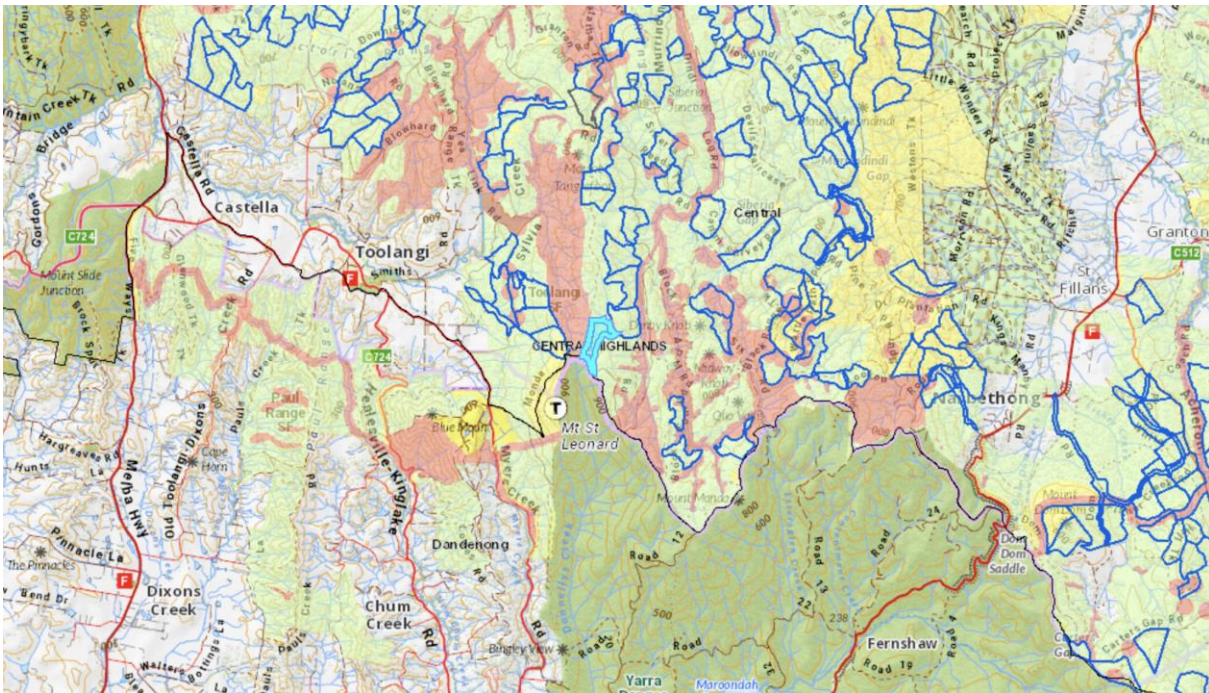


Figure 1 – Map showing the area and TRP coupes. The investigated coupe is highlighted in light blue. Source: Screenshot from DELWP's 'Forest Information Portal' <<https://maps.ffm.vic.gov.au/fip/index.html?viewer=fip>>.



Leadbeater's Possum Zone 1a habitat within and adjacent coupe 300-530-0003.

Method

An active search method was employed:

- Forest in and adjacent to logging coupe 300-530-0003 was actively surveyed between dusk and dawn. This was prior to the coupe becoming active, there were no machines present.
- Patches of habitat were surveyed for Leadbeater's Possum by scanning the mid-storey with a thermal imaging camera and, in some cases, mimicking the call of Leadbeater's Possum
- Once spotted on the thermal imaging camera, spotlights were used to light up the animal and video evidence was obtained using a Sony Handycam
- Upon successfully obtaining video footage of the animal, the camera was panned to a handheld Global Positioning System (GPS) unit to record evidence of the detection time and location
- A waypoint was marked on the GPS unit in the detection location
- Surveying each patch of forest was concluded shortly after obtaining the footage.

Surveyors revisited the coupe on the night of 26 October 2021 and found logging machinery present within the coupe and roading operations had begun through part of the coupe.

Results

Summary

This investigation detected a Leadbeater's Possum at GPS coordinates 370702 5842899 (GDA / MGA Zone 55 H).

Results are provided in the following sections:

- Results 1: Attached video evidence of the Leadbeater's Possum detection and GPX file detailing the location of the Leadbeater's Possum
- Results 2: Screenshot from the attached video evidence showing the Leadbeater's Possum detection
- Results 3: A map of the Leadbeater's Possum detection location and recommended buffer.

Results 1

Refer to attachments 1 and 2.

Results 2



Figure 2 – Screenshot of Leadbeater's Possum detection at approximately 370702 5842899 (GDA / MGA Zone 55 H)



Figure 3 – Photograph of logging machinery at logging coupe 300-530-0003 (Night of 26 Oct 2021)

Results 3

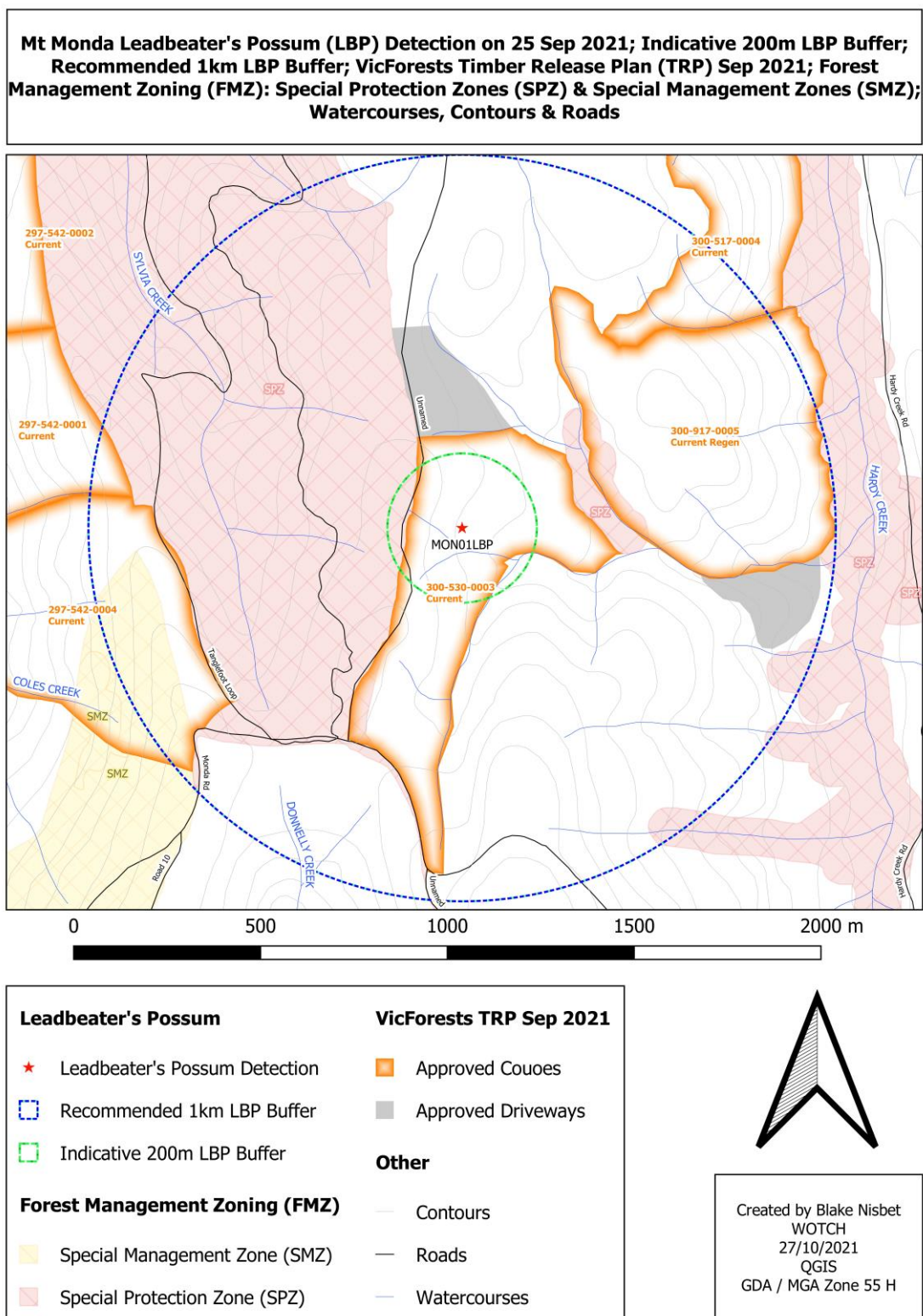


Figure 4 – Map of the Leadbeater's Possum detection at VicForests logging coupe 300-530-0003 with indicative 200m and scientifically recommended 1km Leadbeater's Possum buffers.

Discussion

This report has detailed the detection of a Leadbeater's Possum in VicForests active logging coupe 300-530-0003.

Recommended prescriptions

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.

Mandatory prescriptions

It is mandatory for VicForests, DELWP and any other organisations undertaking timber harvesting operations in state forest of Victoria to comply with all prescriptions outlined in the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014 (the Code).

Figure 5 shows prescriptions in the *Planning Standards for timber harvesting operations in Victoria's State Forests 2014*, a document in the Code that must be enforced by DELWP, following the detection of a Leadbeater's Possum.

<p>4.2 Fauna – fixed zoning:</p> <p>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).</p> <p>4.3 Fauna - detection based zoning</p> <p>Table 4. Establish a SPZ of 200 m radius centred on each verified Leadbeater's Possum colony.</p>
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Figure 5 – excerpt from page 20 of the *Planning Standards*, under subheading 'Table 3 Fixed FMZ rules for fauna'.

Figure 6 shows prescriptions for addressing biodiversity conservation risks in the Code.

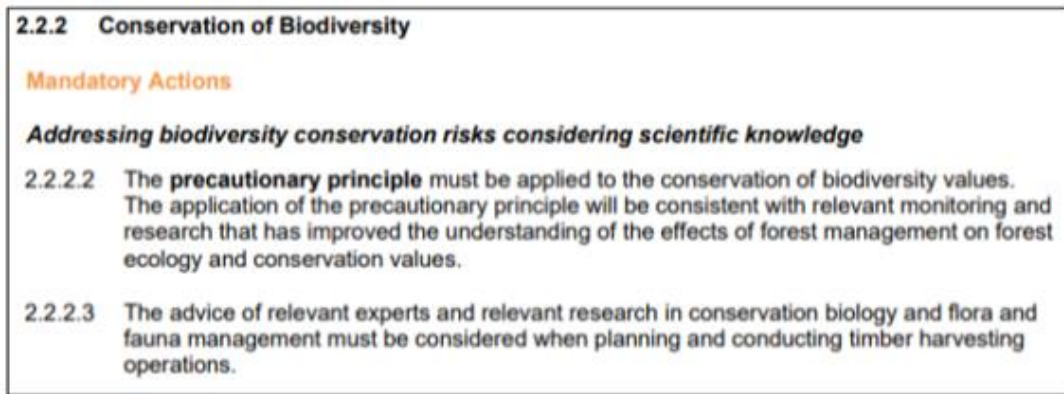


Figure 6 – excerpt from page 34 of the Code, under subheading '2.2 Environmental Values in State Forests'.

Conclusion

This investigation has revealed that VicForests has commenced timber harvesting operations in a coupe containing habitat for the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum. Management actions must be implemented by VicForests and DELWP to protect this significant population of Leadbeater's Possum.

DELWP, as a minimum, must enforce the indicative 200m Special Protection Zone buffer around the Leadbeater's Possum detection location in this report. However, to best support this population of Leadbeater's Possum, DELWP should enforce a 1km buffer around the detection and remove the subject coupe from the Timber Release Plan.

Recommendations

1. DELWP, as a minimum, must immediately cease VicForests from commencing any further timber harvesting operations within active logging coupe 300-530-0003 until the prescribed 200m Special Protection Zone (Figure 4) around this detection has been implemented.
2. VicForests and DELWP should adhere to the relevant scientific advice for the species and establish a 1km Leadbeater's Possum buffer around the detection as seen in Figure 4.
3. Further comprehensive surveys should be undertaken throughout the entirety of the coupe and surrounding coupes to determine the locations of any other Leadbeater's Possum individuals that may be present in or around the coupes.
4. Timber harvesting in active coupe 300-530-0003 should be immediately ceased, and the coupe should be removed from the Timber Release Plan as this area is of high significance to the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum.

