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Forests

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**Victoria's forests - for water, air and wildlife**

Old-growth forests provide clean air and water, homes to our wildlife and act as a buffer against climate change.



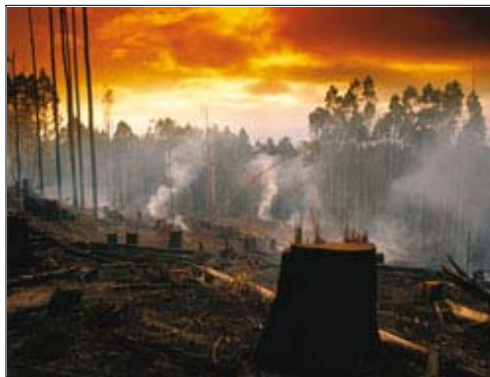
Towering Mountain Ash in the Central Highlands. Photo: Ern Mainka

Victoria's forest species include the tallest hardwood trees and flowering plants on Earth – the remarkable mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*). These magnificent giants predate the arrival of the first European ships and many found in eastern Victoria would tower over most city buildings, growing to the same height as the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) light towers.

According to scientists, an old-growth tree will not regenerate for another 400 years, while the ecological balance – including the food and shelter they provide to many threatened and endangered animals – will not return for another 1,500 years. Can we justify the continuing destruction of such ancient forests when only 8% of old-growth remains since European settlement?

**Air**

Global warming is the planet's greatest environmental threat, caused by an increase in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.



Logging in the Central Highlands. Photo: Ern Mainka

Trees extract carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere as they grow. Over decades, the carbon

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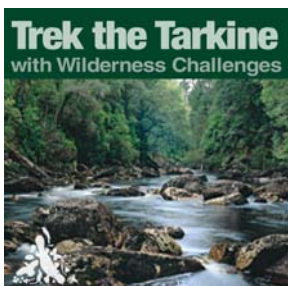
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stores build up within the plants and surrounding soil. When a forest is logged or cleared, the carbon is released in the form of carbon dioxide as the trees burn or rot. Logging old-growth typically releases about half the stored carbon. Protecting our forests will help to reduce Australia's greenhouse pollution.

We also need to ensure that large corridors exist across the landscape so that our wildlife is able move when changes in climate occur. The damp forests of Errinundra plateau have provided a refuge for species for thousands of years. During the last ice age, plants and animals retreated up to the plateau where they remained protected from icy conditions until the continent began to warm. It is vital we protect refuges such as these, as well as providing corridors connecting alpine areas to the coast.

## Water

The Baw Baw plateau is only a few hours' drive east of Melbourne. It is a site of international zoological significance and forms the boundary of one of Melbourne's largest water supply catchments.



Thomson Dam. Photo: Alex Kaeslin

The Thomson River begins its journey on the plateau, winding its way through heathy fens, down through the forested catchments and finally into the Thomson Dam.

Forested catchments act like giant sponges, slowly releasing a long-term supply of crystal clear water to cities, towns, farms and aquatic ecosystems. When forests are logged and burnt, water volumes are reduced by up to 50%.

Regrowing forests are much thirstier than mature forests, drinking the water that would otherwise flow into rivers and dams. It will take around 150 years for water levels to return to those experienced prior to logging. Logging also reduces water quality as large loads of sediment are released into streams, river and dams.

## Wildlife

The Great Dividing Range splits Victoria's Central Highlands, making one half dry and the other wet and damp. This varying rainfall has resulted in a wealth of plant and animal species, many of which are now threatened with extinction, clinging to existence in isolated pockets.



Leadbeater's Possum. *Photo: Fredy Mercay / ANT Photo Library*

The Baw Baw Frog is found only in the region just off the plateau, the Spotted Tree Frog in just a few remaining pristine rivers, and the Powerful Owl and Sooty Owl only in pockets of older trees. It is important not only that these isolated pockets are protected, but also the links between them, ensuring survival and healthy gene flow between populations.

Victoria's faunal emblem, the tiny Leadbeaters Possum, is struggling to survive. The last remaining Leadbeaters in captivity died just two weeks after its mate and only 1000 are thought to survive in the wild. The Leadbeaters will soon be extinct unless the area of the Central Highlands in which it lives is protected from logging.

**For further information about the Victorian Forest Campaign visit [www.voteenvironment.org.au](http://www.voteenvironment.org.au)**

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