

Grange State Forest under pressure

Plans to log 20 Compartments in 3 years, and more to go

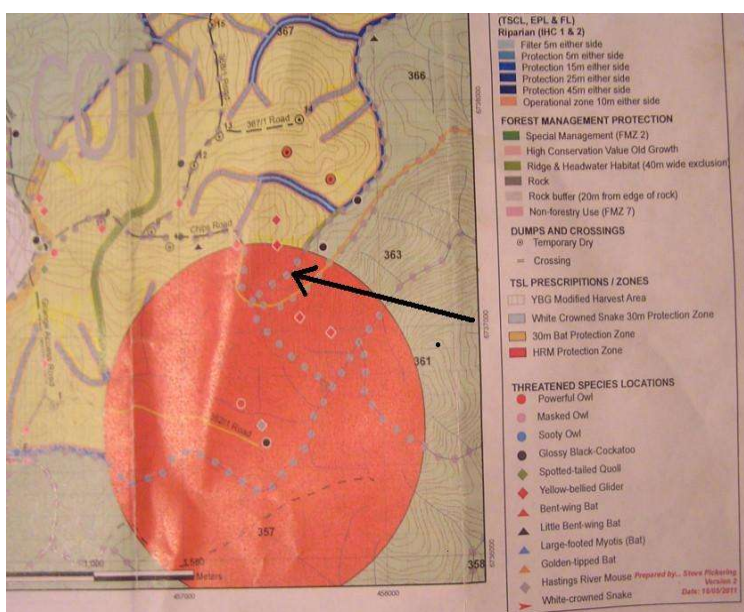
Date: 3rd June 2012

Grange State Forest has featured prominently on this web site since 2010, with Forests NSW being found to have illegally logged Lowland Rainforest, a listed Endangered Ecological Community, now federally listed as critically endangered.

Since early 2010, Forests NSW has been progressively logging compartment after compartment, with the latest plans released bringing the total to 20. Most of these are adjoining, despite their Threatened Species Licence stating (page 37 of the Integrated Forests Operations Approval): ***“In planning the location and order of proposed logging operations under subclause (1), SFNSW, as far as reasonably practicable, disperse those operations over the Upper North East Region and over time, so as to reduce any cumulative impacts of logging operations in any part of the region.”***

One would think that logging 20 compartments in one state forest would result in significant “cumulative impacts”. However, a previous complaint about similar logging at Clouds Creek resulted in our being informed by the regulators that there is nothing that can be done to stop this practice because: ***“This condition does not specify any particular spatial or temporal limits”***. This begs the question – why is the suggestion that operations be dispersed to avoid cumulative impacts of logging even mentioned in the approval?

Grange is a large forest, and we doubt Forests NSW has finished yet, but given the extent of the logging, we determined to undertake an inspection and, as usual, this turned up the usual breaches.



Hastings River Mouse

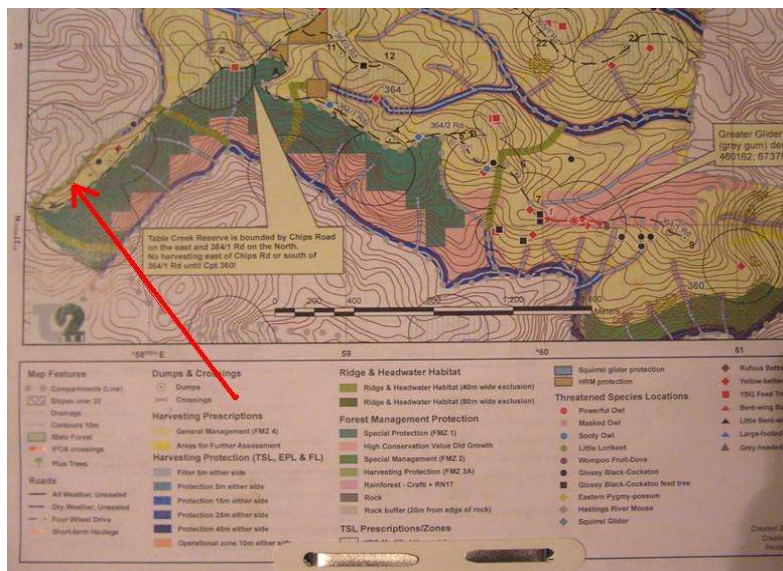
The Operational Map of Harvest Plan 3677 (see picture on left) shows a very large orange circle which the legend tells us is a Hastings River Mouse Protection Zone. Within that 800 metre radius circle all habitat must be ***“assessed and marked appropriately”***.

A close look reveals that the orange circle extends across a number of other compartments, particularly that area indicated by the black arrow.

However, when the harvest plan was drawn up for those adjoining compartments, the orange protection zone is missing (see area indicated by the red arrow at right).

So why is it that, when undertaking its desk-top assessment, did the EPA inspectors fail to notice this omission?

In fact the area that should have been assessed and marked appropriately, and possibly protected, has now been heavily logged – We counted 22 fresh stumps in one 60 metre transect alone (see below). The question must be asked – Was the area properly assessed? Certainly there was no marking to suggest it had been, and the question has been asked.



Heavily logged Hastings River Mouse protection zone.

Habitat tree destruction



In another area we found that instead of using an old snig track, that was used when the compartment was last logged only 11 years ago in 2001, the contractor had gouged a new, less direct route, impinging on the headwater of a mapped stream.

Then, at the track's end we discovered a Tallowwood tree marked "H" on all 4 sides, showing it was a hollow-bearing tree marked for retention (see at left).

Despite the clear marking, and the fact that it was the largest tree anywhere in the vicinity (900mm diameter), with multiple hollow limbs, that tree had been logged.

The dead tree that is lying atop the stump was deliberately knocked over by the machine constructing the required 'roll-overs' (large mounds on the track to stop erosion) after the logging was completed. Dead trees are also supposed to be protected to provide habitat for tree-hollow dependent fauna. That roading operation also unnecessarily destroyed numerous Forest Oaks that are supposedly protected under the threatened species licence as Glossy-black Cockatoo feed trees. All these are breaches of Forests NSW' Approval.

At a nearby log dump 9 we found a large Grey Gum, also marked with "H", which had been cut down, but not for its timber. This tree was simply left lying on the ground. The "H" on the top of the trunk had been crossed out with a painted pink X, but the "H" on the underside had not (see images below), suggesting someone had painted the single "X" after the tree had been cut down. That tree was significantly larger than most other marked "H" trees in the vicinity.



The "H" marking this tree for retention is crossed out



The "H" on the underside remains intact.



As stated, there were a number of "H" trees marked in the vicinity, mostly smaller than the felled Grey Gum, including one pathetically small tree with a diameter of less than 450mm (see at left), with a poor crown, and no hollows at all.

The regulations require that the largest "H" trees must be retained – another breach.



A large logged Tallowwood with multiple hollow limbs, with the stump visible 30m away in the background.

Back along the road another snig track has been cleared for some 300m to allow for just 40, mostly small, trees to be logged. There was no marking up of habitat and recruitment trees at all along that track (another breach). Again, the largest tree harvested was Tallowwood, and again it contained multiple hollow branches (see at left and below), indicating it would have provided good habitat. However, the fact that it wasn't marked means that it's logging is not a breach.

There were side tracks where vegetation had been trampled by the harvesting machine, seemingly wandering around looking for something to cut down, often without finding any, and at the end of the track it had trampled vegetation within a 20m exclusion zone on a cliff edge (another breach).



We actually received a letter from the Office of Environment and Heritage (dated May 31, 2012), responding to our concerns about Forests NSW's failure to apply prescriptions relating to the retention and protection of hollow-bearing trees. That letter included the statement that: *“The EPA notes your concerns regarding the failure of Forests NSW to mark hollow-bearing trees. The EPA is aware of the past and current issues associated with Forests NSW selection and protection of hollow-bearing and recruitment trees....”*, and that: *“The EPA continues to target these issues in their proactive auditing and enforcement role and expect Forests NSW to improve their practices and achieve the desired outcome that is protection at all times”*.

Sadly that improvement was not evident in this latest logging of Grange State Forest, and this issue has been at the forefront of our campaign for the best part of a decade. In fact, in relation to the destruction of marked habitat trees it seems that the logging contractors are in charge, with both Forests NSW and the EPA apparently incapable of identifying these breaches. Certainly they had not done so on this occasion.

Eastern Chestnut Mouse records ignored

The efficacy of Forests NSW' Harvest Plans is again called into question, as is the EPA's desktop assessment of Harvest Plans. This time for harvest plan No. 355, where our investigation shows that NSW Wildlife Atlas records for Eastern Chestnut Mouse have been overlooked or ignored, with no mention of the species at all.

Further investigation showed that the Atlas records had come from Forests NSW's own records, having been lodged in 2010.

So if they were Forests NSW's own records, why were they not included on the harvest plan? This case has disturbing similarities to the Styx River Rufous Scrub-bird debacle, where Forests NSW is currently under investigation over its deleting of Scrub-bird records from their data base, allowing an extra 20 hectares to be logged.

Once again the omission of those records has not been picked up by the EPA officers charged with monitoring compliance. If our volunteers can find these omissions, why can't the EPA?

Endangered rainforest recognition.

We have also expressed concern over the repeated failure of Forests NSW to correctly identify rainforest types. Our revelations in 2010 that they had logged the endangered Lowland Rainforest at Grange, and subsequent investigations and report by a rainforest expert confirming our claims, proves that that community does occur at Grange.

Despite that fact, subsequent harvest plans repeatedly report that the Lowland Rainforest is *“unlikely to occur”*. Our latest investigation did find remnants of Lowland Rainforest. They were not logged on this occasion but they were there, and there is significant evidence to suggest that the community has been decimated by logging in the past. That evidence is by way of virtually tree-free creek and drainage lines that are now covered by an impenetrable mass of Lantana (see below).



A Lantana infested drainage line, which likely contained Lowland Rainforest, has been heavily logged in the past, and now more heavy logging has further extended the damage.

Bell Miner Associated Dieback

The lantana understorey is developing across the entire Grange State Forest, and the landscape, such as that pictured above, virtually guarantees that a Bell Miner Associated Dieback outbreak will occur in the not too distant future. The Bell Birds are already present yet, despite the NSW Scientific Committee identifying canopy reduction above 35% as being a trigger for the disease, the heavy logging regime that is clearly shown above, continues unabated.

Compiled by John Edwards
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