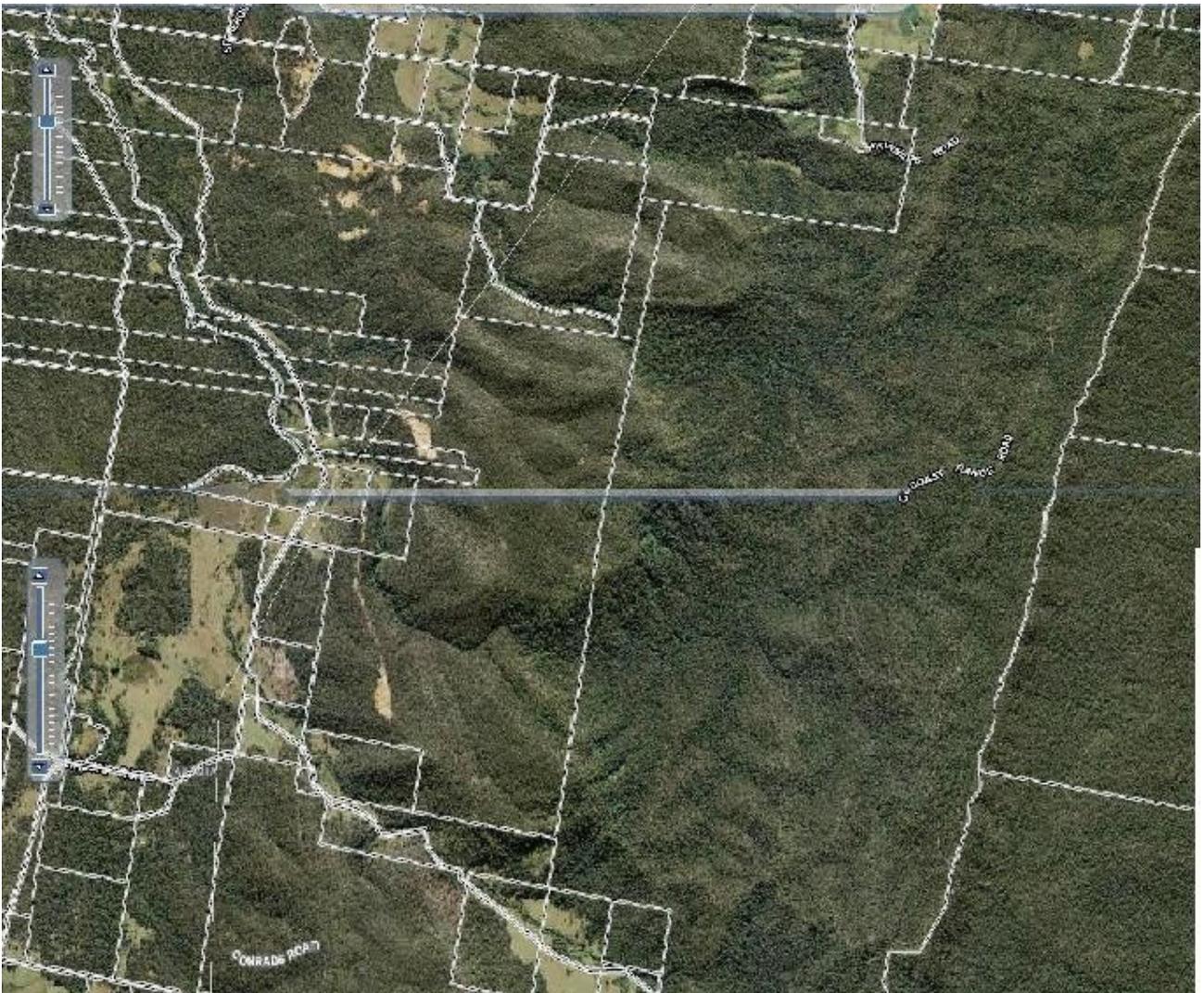


Report

on

Preliminary assessment of Emu habitat between the Pacific Highway and the Coast Range from Halfway Creek to Woolli Road.

On the 19th November, in 35° heat, I met up with Mick Franklin at his property south of Glenugie Peak (Mount Elaine) in the Clarence Valley, to follow-up Mick's report that there were significant obstacles to movement of the endangered Coastal Emu population. Essentially he reported that the forest, which dominates the landscape between the Pacific Highway and the Coast Range, north from Halfway Creek to Woolli Road, was now so dense that Emus simply couldn't access their traditional foraging grounds.



The mostly forested country that we drove through on the preliminary survey

Mick, and an Aboriginal friend of his from Corindi Beach, drove me up to the Coast Range along a rough winding bush track east of his place, then along the range, venturing into some of the maze of old logging tracks, before finally doubling back to the south, past Pigeon Gully to exit the forest onto the Highway via Bald Knob Road.

As the fourth generation of his family to farm that property, Mick's knowledge of that part of the coast range is intimate having spent his childhood working with timber men and retrieving cattle, on horseback and on foot, and his knowledge of where the Emus traditionally moved across the landscape comes from a life-time of observation, but I suspect even he is not absolutely certain of their exact movements, which he explained vary depending on seasonal weather conditions, and fire occurrence.



Not everything went smoothly on the day

It was clear to see what Mick meant by the forest being clogged, particularly the gully lines where the emus would traditionally have foraged for berries. Some Lantana infestations are an absolute disgrace, and both Forest Corp and the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) should be condemned for their negligence, and certainly we can, and should, put pressure on both to lift their game.

In areas where Lantana isn't a problem, the heavy logging that has been occurring over recent decades has promoted fairly dense tree regrowth in some areas, and a lot of ground timber, tree crowns from logging, where burning hasn't occurred, all of which adds to the obstacle course the Emus, and their chicks, have to contend with.



An Emu with chick facing a dense barrier of vegetation, is forced to take its chances on the road

Mick is of the opinion that any Emu movement is now restricted to man-made trails, sharing them with wild dogs which use those tracks for the same reason, a lethal combination for Emus.

Coast Range Road, all the way through from Wooli to Bald Knob Roads is in good condition having been recently fixed up, which is a worry as it could be the precursor to more logging. However, a check of Forest Corp's logging schedule finds no mention of Newfoundland State Forest at this point.

Mick also has a theory that fire is the short term answer, but should be carried out in autumn, not in winter when animals are hibernating, or spring when birds nesting, as is currently the case.

The OEH on the other hand (according to Mick) is espousing a “no burn” policy, so I suggested that as we have the “ecological burning Guru” on the team, we should arrange a trip with he and representatives of OEH and perhaps even ForestCorp, to properly assess the situation and see what can be done.



The rain-forested gullies of the coast range are generally in good ecological condition

The gully lines mostly contain palms and other rainforest elements, and because they are excluded from logging, most are still in good ecological condition, and should be providing great foraging habitat for Emus, but many are surrounded by Lantana which, when burned, has caused significant collateral damage to the gully vegetation, something that needs to be avoided if strategic fire tactics are attempted.



Impenetrable barriers of Lantana such as this in the national park, are frequently what the Emus face when trying to access their traditional gully feeding grounds.

**Compiled by John Edwards
for the Clarence Environment Centre.**