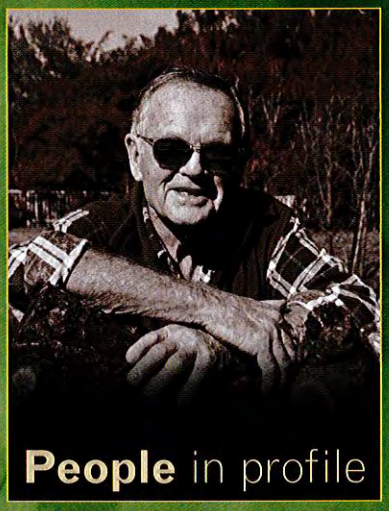


People in profile

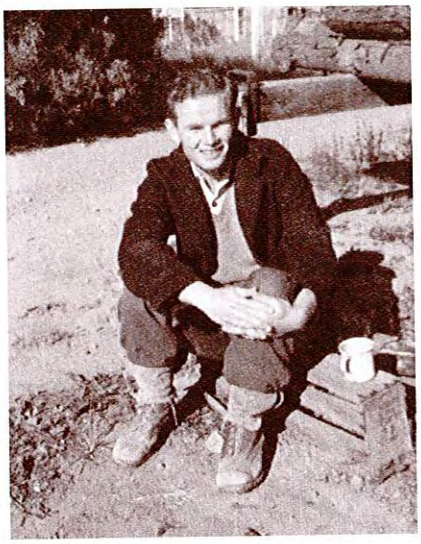
by Samille Mitchell and Dr Libby Mattiske

Dr Joe Havel has been a pioneer of the concept of sustainable forestry in Western Australia, thanks to a lifetime of work and an extraordinary body of achievement in the thick of the forestry, industry and conservation debates.

Forester Joe Havel

Despite having helped reserve large tracts of land for the protection of biodiversity, and having an enduring love of trees, retired forester and scientist Joe Havel is reluctant to be labelled a 'greenie'. Speaking from his home in Wanneroo—an acreage filled with native trees in an ever-encroaching urban environment—Joe says conservation and forestry can go hand in hand. The former forester firmly believes that the key to conservation is in finding that delicate balance between development, management, conservation and recreation.

However, having once been on the frontline of trying to appease industry, the environmental movement and recreational interests, he admits that discovering a balance to please all is no easy task. He remembers fierce and heated debates during the late 1970s and 1980s as he battled to settle land-use conflicts and introduce the concept of multiple land-use planning. But, having experienced Nazi-occupied Europe, then fleeing the Communist regime of Czechoslovakia, surviving refugee camps, re-educating himself in Australia and embarking on a forestry career in New Guinea and Australia, Joe was better equipped than most with the strength and determination to give it a go.



Previous page
Main Jarrah forest.
Photo – Jiri Lochman
Inset Joe Havel.
Photo – Samille Mitchell/DEC

Left Joe in his younger days.
Photo – Dr Ted Cullen

Below Fifty-year-old *Pinus pinaster* plantation at Gnangara.
Photo – Jackson Parker

The beginnings

It was 1948 and a 17-year-old Jaroslav (Joe) Havel had just endured the horrors of six years of Nazi occupation in his home village in Czechoslovakia. But the relief at the end of the war was short-lived as Europe was carved up and, in 1948, Communism swept across his country. Joe told his father of his plans to escape, but was met with firm disapproval and a warning that he'd never be more than a labourer should he flee. Undeterred, young Joe and a friend began training themselves in night-walking, mountain-climbing and sleeping out in the open to prepare themselves for escape. Then, on the Easter weekend of the same year, they told their parents they were going for an Easter hike, caught a train to the base of the mountains bordering Germany, and took flight. From the last train station they sent their parents a letter asking them to report their disappearance to the police, as by then they would either be out of the country or caught.

Joe's voice quivers with emotion as he recalls their fear that they may be saying goodbye forever.

The duo made their way through a formerly German-inhabited area by being inconspicuous—they carried no luggage and spoke to virtually no one. Others were not so lucky—grabbed by Communist soldiers or border guards made suspicious by strange accents or by the luggage they were carrying. Next, put off-course by a difficult stream crossing, the two nearly stumbled into a border guard camp and, in their terror, literally ran up a mountain to put it behind them. They dug into the snow that night and awaited the morning light to get their bearings. When dawn breathed its first light upon the mountains, they saw it was all downhill in front of them—they'd reached the other side of the range and the relative safety of the American-occupation zone in Germany. Several refugee camps later, and after a failed bid to travel to Canada, Joe was told he'd been accepted in a foreign land on the other side of the world—Australia.

Australian shores

After landing at Fremantle and being housed in what was then the Graylands Migrant Camp, Joe obtained work as an engine cleaner, then a timber stacker at Jarrahdale and, later, as a member of a forestry gang at Gleneagle. Having come from a coal-mining district devoid of trees, Joe had a passion for trees and already knew he wanted to work as a forester. However, he recognised the needed to further his education to avoid his

father's prediction of a future as a labourer. So he asked about schooling opportunities and, while working at Jarrahdale and Gleneagle, did his university entrance studies by correspondence. Basic qualifications complete, he set his sights higher. This time he wanted a scholarship. Most told the young refugee he had no chance but, through sheer perseverance and doggedness, he was eventually awarded a Commonwealth scholarship. After two years of science study at The University of Western Australia, he went to Canberra, location of the country's only professional forestry course. While there he took up a forestry cadetship in New Guinea.

On completion of his study, Joe married WA woman Betty Currie, and then travelled to a small gold mining town in New Guinea. He progressed through a number of jobs, including plantation management, research and regional management. His research earned him a Master of Science degree at the University of Queensland. When the United Nations insisted on independence for New Guinea, Joe was given the job of training local foresters. In preparation for the role, he completed a Diploma of Education and studied forestry training in Dwellingup, New Zealand and Fiji. On return to New Guinea he prepared the teaching materials from scratch and started the forestry college as its first principal. However, after 10 years in New Guinea, Joe and Betty decided to return to Australia to ensure proper treatment for their son, who had a bone disease.

A career is forged

It wasn't long before Joe was working with the WA Forests Department investigating how soil quality affected the growth of pine plantations. He soon discovered that he could determine how well pines would grow by monitoring the composition of native vegetation. He noticed that areas of high natural biodiversity had variable soil types—a factor that was not ideal for pine plantations, which needed uniform soils. So Joe persuaded the department to preserve areas of native vegetation with high levels of biodiversity. "We had areas that could be ecological jewels but forestry disasters," he said. This move resulted in additions to Yanchep National Park, the creation of Melaleuca Park and, later, the reservation of many areas of northern jarrah forest.

The ecological relationships that Joe had revealed were soon applied to the south-west forests, leading to a different approach to interpreting the patterns of species and vegetation in relation to landforms, soils and climatic zones. In addition, these ecological relationships and patterns assisted future work to manage, conserve and integrate multiple land uses within the south-west forests.

Top Joe supervised the planting of these *Araucaria* trees in New Guinea 40 years before this photo was taken.

Above Natural regeneration of another species of *Araucaria* tree following selective logging in the Parana Province, Brazil.
Photos – Joe Havel collection

The significance of these relationships was summarised in a range of publications including the 'Havel' forestry bulletins in the 1970s, a group of studies known as 'System 6' and regional forest agreement flora and vegetation studies undertaken in

conjunction with plant ecologist Dr Libby Mattiske.

This ecological understanding has assisted in the design of a range of research projects since the mid 1970s, which even today underpins ecological studies in the south-west forests.

Later, Joe was promoted to inspector and then superintendent within the Forests Department. His role was to supervise, support and mentor a range of scientists, foresters, technical staff and support staff in the research and planning teams. Many of these key scientists still work within the south-west forests and speak fondly of their mentor. His colleagues remember Joe's ability to pass on his pragmatic and professional approach to many facets of forest management.

Entering a political minefield

Around the time Joe was pioneering new approaches to forestry research, the environmental movement was beginning to gain momentum and prompted a major push for more land to be conserved in reserves in the south-west. But, according to Joe, the manner in which this was done was a recipe for disaster. "The proposal included a lot of private land in reserves and local people were ready to lynch the proponents," Joe says.

Joe and a handful of others were given the job of attempting to defuse the tension. The next step was a reserves and mapping proposal known as the System 6 Study—something Joe likens to "the political equivalent of the tsunami in Japan". Joe's position as the chief of the Forests Department's research division saw him working on a number of committees within System 6, which made recommendations for reserves in an area stretching from Gingin to Bridgetown.

The System 6 process was the start of a different era, a time when the battle between interests in water, environment and industry became paramount. "Everyone had a prime objective and no one was willing to give up their rights," Joe said.

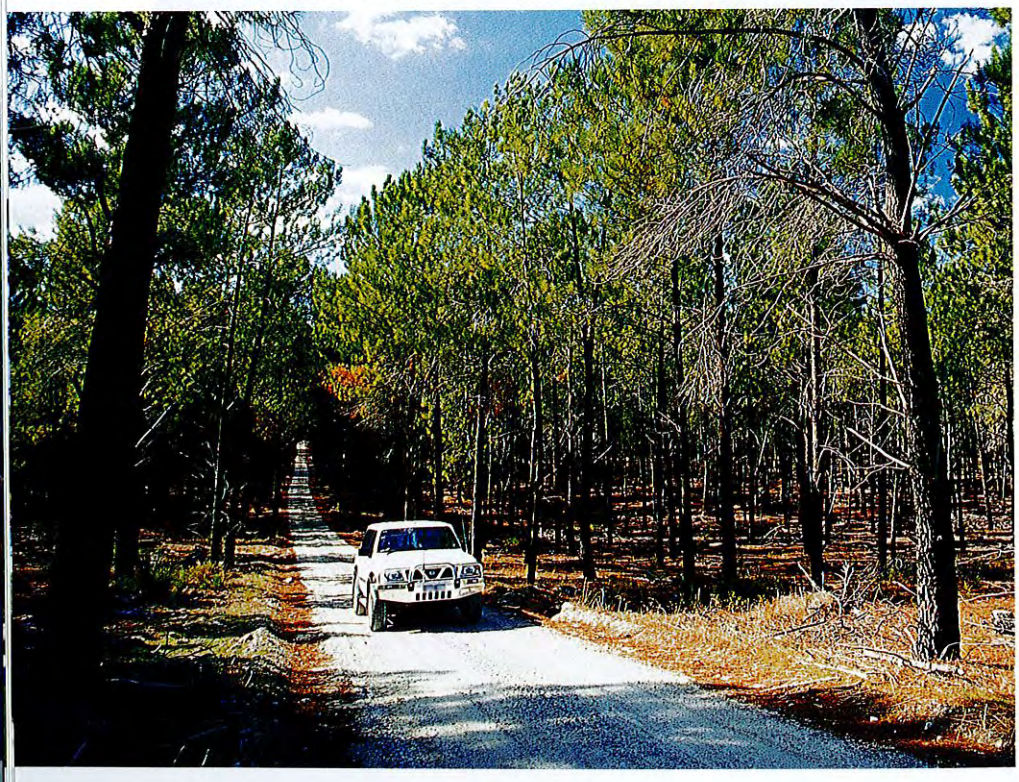
Joe had already conducted some work with Dr Libby Mattiske and other forestry colleagues in mapping large tracts of forest for reserves, but he says the green movement kept demanding bigger areas. "We just couldn't get anyone to agree—you want your dams, you want your reserves, you want your industry," Joe said. However, after many meetings and through negotiations, a deal was struck in which the conservation movement gave up areas containing bauxite in return for areas including what are today Monadnocks and Lane Poole reserves.

Forestry in decline

Pressured by the strength of the environmental movement, forestry began to fall into decline. The Forests Department was combined with Fauna Research and the National Parks Authority to become the Department of Conservation and Land Management, in which Joe was the director of research and planning. But Joe, weary from the political turbulence and years of negotiating, past his minimum retirement age and recovering from a heart attack, decided it was time to retire from government. Later, he started his own private consulting firm. Not one to ease into retirement, Joe also embarked on a PhD on the ecology of the forests of south-western Australia in relation to climate, landforms and soils, which he completed at age 70.

Below A pine plantation in Gnangara, where Joe conducted much of his early work.
Photo – Chris Garnett/DEC

Below right Joe celebrates his 70th birthday, the age he completed a PhD.
Photo – Joe Havel collection



Future of forestry

While Joe is all for environmental protection, he sees an important place for foresters in management of both native and planted forests to achieve a sustainable forestry industry in WA. He believes refusing to cut trees here simply moves the problem to other areas, like Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, where logging continues at an alarming and unsustainable rate. Referring to the current carbon pollution debate, Joe points to timber as having a smaller carbon footprint than many construction alternatives. "You can produce timber with a low carbon impact," he says. "Aluminium uses the most energy to produce, steel also requires a lot of energy but timber uses the least of all. Timber is carbon dioxide, water and sunshine locked up together."

Joe advocates the use of selective regeneration forestry, whereby only some trees are cut from a forest, even if it is often more costly and less effective than clear felling. "This system not only produces timber but also has environmental advantages," he says. "Most of the so-called old-growth forests are actually regenerated, cut-over forests—the classic example being Boranup Forest in Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park. The fact that young trees fix more carbon than old ones is another benefit. Also, if forests are not thinned little incoming rain reaches the dams."

Joe says many people are scarred from images of old-growth forests being clear-felled on a large scale in the earlier forestry days. "But forestry doesn't have to be considered in this way. Just look at Europe where people accept sustainable forestry in the same areas they recreate—they get timber product but still have areas of largely natural environment. They still get their recreation, their deer and their squirrels, their bluebells and their buttercups. I think we could take a leaf from their book."

Top Monadnocks Conservation Park was one reserve to result from Joe's negotiations.
Photo – Brett Dennis/Lochman Transparencies

Above Boranup Forest, Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park, is a regenerated forest.
Photo – Tiffany Taylor/DEC

Samille Mitchell is a Department of Environment and Conservation editor and features writer. She can be contacted by email (samille.mitchell@dec.wa.gov.au).

Dr Libby Mattiske runs Mattiske Consulting and can be contacted by email (libby@mattiske.com.au).

Volume 27 Number 1 SPRING 2011

contents

Regulars

Publishing credits
Executive editor Madeleine Clews.
Editors Joanna Moore, Samille Mitchell.
Scientific/technical advice Kevin Thiele, Lachie McCaw, Keith Morris, Chris Simpson.
Design and production Tiffany Taylor, Peter Nicholas, Natalie Jolakoski, Gooitzen van der Meer, Sonja Schott, Lynne Whittle.
Illustration Gooitzen van der Meer.
Cartography Promaco Geodraft.
Marketing Cathy Birch.
Phone (08) 9334 0296 or *fax* (08) 9334 0432.
Subscription enquiries
Phone (08) 9219 8000.
Prepress and printing GEON, Western Australia.

ISSN 0815-4465

Please do not send unsolicited material, but feel free to contact the editors.

Published by the Department of Environment and Conservation, 17 Dick Perry Avenue, Kensington, Western Australia.

Visit DEC online at www.dec.wa.gov.au to search the *LANDSCOPE* catalogue.

Department of
Environment and Conservation