

WA's Old Growth Forests

A Guide

What Is Old Growth Forest?

A widely accepted definition of old growth forest is:

"Forest that is ecologically mature and has been subjected to negligible unnatural disturbance such as logging, roading and clearing...in which the upper stratum or overstorey is in the late mature to overmature growth phases." NFPS, 1992.

The essential characteristics of old growth forest are:

continuity: in old growth forests the natural cycle of growth and chain of evolution have not been broken.

age: the dominant trees in old growth forest are centuries old, and smaller trees may also be very old. Old growth forests contain trees and seedlings of different ages: as the oldest trees die and fall, younger trees and seedlings grow up to replace them. In other words, old growth forests are self-regenerating systems.

naturalness: there has been no obvious clearing and no intensive logging (clearfelling).

ecological attributes: these include biological diversity, structural diversity and varied habitat. Essential components are big old trees, live and dead, often gnarled, with hollows of all shapes and sizes, and fallen trees.

authenticity: the fact that it has not been significantly disturbed by humans, in particular through modern industrial impacts, and is as it has evolved through the forces of nature over thousands of years, gives old growth forest the same authenticity as an original work of art as

opposed to a fake or imitation.

"It is not feasible to log old growth forests, as defined by the Inquiry, and yet retain their full complement of old growth attributes and values. Logging of old growth potentially violates the precautionary principle of sustainable development in that an irreplaceable resource is being destroyed..."

Resource Assessment Commission, 1992

In WA all unlogged forest is old growth, and forest that was selectively logged for only a few trees (the biggest and best shaped) is also old growth because it still has the essential characteristics.

The old growth forests of WA's South West also encompass other ecosystems that are not tree-dominated, such as heathlands and wetlands.

Why Is Old Growth Forest Important?

Most people understand that old growth forest is important. They know it is special and beautiful and, given side-by-side comparison, very different from post-clearfelling regrowth, even if they might have difficulty defining what the difference is.

Old growth forest has unique values NOT found in regrowth. These include:

- ♦ **ecological and scientific value:** all the biodiversity found in WA's forests evolved in old growth forest ecosystems. For example, about 50 species of birds and mammals, such as cockatoos and possums, depend for their survival on hollows that exist only in old growth trees. Old growth forests also provide important scientific benchmarks and evolutionary records.

- ♦ **economic value:** old growth forest is important for the tourism industry. Visitors are attracted from around Australia and the world to admire WA's old growth forests. Small areas in a few parks and reserves and in narrow strips along some roads and rivers cannot provide a sufficient resource for tourism even in the short term. Old growth forest is also important for the beekeeping industry. A sustainable, job-rich, fine woodcraft industry could be based on the careful selective logging of small areas of old growth forest, but this option too is being destroyed by the current rate of old growth forest logging.

- ♦ **aesthetic value:** the old growth forest landscape across the lower South West of WA is of immense beauty. Ongoing clearing, mining and logging, are transforming that landscape. Current government planning that proposes to leave only small isolated islands and corridors of old growth forest is a tragedy for the region.

- ♦ **cultural and spiritual value:** old growth forests are part of the heritage and living environment of all Australians. Their ancient, pristine qualities give them great spiritual value.

The combination of these values makes old growth forest unique, irreplaceable, and priceless.

THE SOUTH-WEST TIMBER-TREKKING CO.

See the beautiful South-West Timberlands from horseback, as you make your way through National Park Horse Trails and Old Forestry Logroads.

DAY TREKS

CAMP-OUTS

GROUPS INDIVIDUALLY CATERED FOR

QUIET HORSES

For more information, please phone
PAUL OWENS on (097) 76 7199
PO Box 41, Northcliffe, WA 6262



The South-West Timber-Trekking Co. also offers forest treks for bushwalkers on foot. Fully catered 1, 2 or 3 night campouts or just a pleasant 3-hour stroll through the spectacular Northcliffe Forest Park.

How Much Old Growth Forest Is There In WA?

When Europeans arrived in WA, all the forests were old growth because the Aboriginal people used the forests without cutting down the trees or destroying the understorey. Today about half the pre-European forests are gone, and much of the remaining forest has been heavily and repeatedly logged.

Of the 2.5 million ha of forest left in WA, only about 400,000 ha are unlogged old growth. More than half of that is in State forest and is being targeted for logging.

We believe there is an equal or even larger area of selectively logged forest that should be classified as old growth because it retains the essential characteristics of old growth. Most selectively logged old growth is in State forest, and CALM is targeting it for logging.

No accurate maps of the real extent of old growth forests have been published.

What Is Happening To Wa's Old Growth Forest?

Almost all logging in WA's native forests takes place in old growth. CALM's forest management is based on the belief that the best use for native forests is wood production, and that the best way to produce wood is to convert mixed aged, multi-species, irregular, old growth forest into even-aged, uniform, single species industrial wood crops. CALM's goal is to convert as much old growth to short rotation regrowth as possible, as quickly as possible.

What Does Logging Do To Old Growth Forest?

The intensive logging practices used by CALM and the native forest timber industry over wide areas have many harmful impacts on the forest environment, many of which may be irreversible.

Current intensive logging: requires extensive road construction, which leads to permanent removal of forests and allows access for fire, pests and diseases, fragments forest ecosystems, removes structural diversity e.g. big old trees with hollows, over large areas; reduces biological diversity; introduces pests and diseases, and exposes native wildlife to foxes and cats; disturbs soils and depletes nutrients; pollutes freshwater ecosystems; requires extensive use of fire for regeneration and protective

CALMA Takes Over

EARLY one morning last month a well organised team of forest rescuers belonging to Citizens Against Land Mismanagement in Australia (CALMA) surrounded CALM's offices in Hackett Drive, Crawley, and declared the area a "Temporary Control Area". They issued 'infringement notices' to CALM executives as they entered the building.

At the same time, the new Executive Director of CALM, Ms Leith Maddock, and her new executive, took up their places inside the CALM boardroom.

The new Executive Director issued a statement setting out key reforms that will be immediately instigated:

"Under my new management, CALM will adopt and comply with a *conservation ethic*, in place of its previous ethic of dominating and exploiting nature.

"CALM will also, for the first time, operate on the basis

of openness, truthfulness, and accountability.

"In relation to forest management, CALM's first steps will be:
An immediate moratorium on the logging of old growth forests.
An immediate overhaul of the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process. The new RFA will be open, participatory and constructive, and will focus on the careful negotiation of 'win-win' outcomes for the forests, sustainable industries, local communities and future generations.
An immediate overhaul of prescribed burning. We now recognise that current practices are likely to cause widespread irreversible harm to our environment, and that other options have not been properly investigated."

What Should Happen To WA's Old Growth Forest?

Old growth forest is now too rare and too valuable to be logged, especially when the main products are woodchips, charcoal logs and waste. It is of more value to present and future generations of Western Australians as intact forest than as woodchips, charcoal or even sawn timber.

We do not need to log old growth forest because existing plantations in WA can supply virtually all our timber needs.

Most Western Australians want old growth forest protected. The most important decision we can make to influence what forests will be like tomorrow is not to clearfelling old growth forest today.

"Australia's old growth eucalypt forests are unique, exhibiting a long evolutionary history compared with temperate ecosystems on other continents...The challenges posed by old growth eucalypt forest management in Australia are unique and by virtue of historical events, lie with our generation... Significant reductions in logging quotas and major changes to current codes of forest practice are required if stated biodiversity conservation goals are to be achieved."

Norton, 1996

References

National Forest Policy Statement, Commonwealth of Australia, 1992.
Norton, T.W. (1996). Conserving biological diversity in Australia's temperate eucalypt forests, *Forest Ecology and Management*, 85, pp21-33.
Resource Assessment Commission, Final Report, 1992.