



FORESTRYSA
COMMUNITY
FOREST
MANAGEMENT
ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

FOREWORD



The Charter of the South Australian Forestry Corporation outlines the primary commercial operations of the organisation. It also stipulates a number of specific, non-commercial activities to be carried out by ForestrySA. These are agreed to be non-commercial by both the Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development and the Treasurer.

This report summarises these activities undertaken during 2019-20, funded via ForestrySA's purchasing arrangement with the Minister and the Treasurer, known as Community Service Obligations (CSO).

ForestrySA CSO funding supports native forest management, community fire protection, community use of forest reserves and industry development.

CSO activities and reporting requirements are determined and monitored under a Memorandum of Administrative Arrangement between ForestrySA and the Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA).

ForestrySA remains a committed leader in public land management, undertaking conservation work across 4,385ha (27%) of gazetted native forest reserve during the year.

The 2019-20 year was a mixed one for ForestrySA's Community Forestry team, due to unforeseen challenges presented by an intense bushfire season and the global COVID-19 pandemic.

ForestrySA remains committed to fire management and risk mitigation activities in partnership with other agencies, including the Country Fire Service.

The 2019-20 fire danger season got off to one of the busiest starts on record, with ForestrySA crews simultaneously responding to multiple, significant fires across the Mount Lofty Ranges and Green Triangle. Fire crews attended 26 fires, both on and off ForestrySA land, during the season.

While ForestrySA's formal statistics show forest visitation was down across 2019-20 as a whole (145,647 visitors, down from 263,522 the previous year), regular staff observation tells another story, post COVID-19 restrictions.

ForestrySA forest reserves are alive with activity, forest carparks are regularly full and public demand for recreation permits, camping and accommodation have increased exponentially. It seems COVID-19 has sparked a renewed appreciation for South Australia's forests, parks and wide open spaces and their role in keeping us healthy and grounded.

ForestrySA's new online permit system for horse riding and fossicking permits was launched in late January 2020, with online camping permits available from May, providing streamlined access to forest activities and recreation sites. Despite the COVID-19-related closure of many forest sites, more than 25,000 permits were purchased for activities such as cave diving, adventure caving, fossicking, horse riding, events and forest camping and accommodation.

ForestrySA is continuing to build on the recreational and tourism opportunities available within its forests across the Mount Lofty Ranges and Green Triangle. Thanks to a unique mix of plantation and native forest, located in proximity to much of the state's population, it is likely they will remain areas of high recreational growth for years to come.

And while ForestrySA has been able to achieve so much during 2019-20, many more community-focused projects remain on the drawing board due to budget constraints.

As the community's interest in the natural environment continues to grow, we look forward to continuing our work with other agencies and public land managers to deliver our Community Service Obligations.

Julian Speed, Chief Executive

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1. INTRODUCTION

ForestrySA manages:

- the State-owned commercial plantations in the Mount Lofty Ranges
- Native Forest Reserves and recreational access to OneFortyOne forest in the Green Triangle
- areas of native vegetation (most of which is gazetted as native forest reserve) within the Mount Lofty Ranges and Green Triangle.

In addition to its commercial activities, and in accordance with its Charter, ForestrySA undertakes a number of non-commercial activities as a Community Service Obligation (CSO) for which it receives funding from the South Australian Government.

CSO funding supports:

- Native forest management
- Community use of forest reserves
- Forestry industry development
- Community protection (including fire) and forest industry support activities
- Management of the Mid North forests.

2. GOVERNANCE

ForestrySA operates in accordance with:

- The Charter of the South Australian Forestry Corporation which outlines ForestrySA's strategic commercial direction (commercial operations) and CSOs to manage native forests, provide community fire protection, provide for community use of its forests and conduct forest industry development (primarily research).
- The *South Australian Public Corporations Act 1993 (SA)* which requires that as a public corporation, ForestrySA must perform its commercial operations in accordance with prudent commercial principles and perform its non-commercial operations in an efficient and effective manner consistent with the requirements of its Charter.
- The *South Australian Forestry Corporation Act 2000*, which allows ForestrySA to fulfil its statutory functions to be a business enterprise as a public corporation.
- A Memorandum of Administrative Arrangement (MoAA) that identifies the services ForestrySA will deliver with the Community Service Obligation (CSO) funding it receives and which describes specific reporting requirements. This MoAA is an agreement between ForestrySA and the Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA).

3. POLICY FRAMEWORK

ForestrySA's activities are undertaken in accordance with its Sustainable Forest Management Policy.

ForestrySA is committed to sustainable forest management, a safe environment for employees and compliance with relevant legislative requirements, standards and codes.

The policy seeks to:

- Provide the framework for sustainable forest management practices, processes, systems and review
- Optimise environmental, economic, social and cultural values of forests and lands managed by ForestrySA
- Improve organisational performance and forest management outcomes while ensuring the expectations of all customers, stakeholders and the community are considered

The full version of ForestrySA's Sustainable Forest Management Policy is available at www.forestrysa.com.au.

4. PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document provides an overview of the CSO-funded programs delivered and a summary of the activities undertaken by ForestrySA during 2019-20. It also fulfils reporting requirements under the MoAA.

5. SUMMARY - 2019-20

The 2019-20 year was a mixed one for ForestrySA's Community Forestry team, with significant challenges faced as a result of the bushfire season, followed closely by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, ForestrySA Forest Reserves continue to be a valued community asset, perhaps more so now than ever before.

While formal statistics indicate a decline in total forest visitation numbers during 2019-20 (an estimated total of 145,647 visitors, down from 263,522 the previous year) as a result of infrastructure damage sustained in the 2019 Cudlee Creek bushfire and COVID-19-related event cancellations, staff observations suggest the forests are more popular than ever.

“ForestrySA forest reserves are alive with activity, forest carparks are regularly full and public demand for forest recreation permits, camping and accommodation have increased exponentially.”

This highlights the importance of the natural forest environment for positive social and mental health and wellbeing, as well as for recreational activities, events, research and conservation.

Aligned with the increase in forest visitation during the year was a notable rise in trespass and other incidents, including illegal firewood collection, reports of aggressive dogs and unauthorised motor bike and 4WD access.

To address this activity in specific hot-spots, action plans were prepared and implemented in conjunction with neighbours, councils and other government agencies.

ForestrySA's online camping and accommodation booking and recreation permit systems went live in May 2020. More than 25,000 people purchased permits for cave diving, adventure caving, fossicking, horse riding, events and camping during the year.

While the onset of COVID-19 forced the closure of picnic grounds, camping and accommodation venues in April

2020, these sites were very quickly booked out upon the easing of South Australian restrictions in mid-May.

ForestrySA's non-regulated recreational fee structure was reviewed for the first time in more than 20 years, with some new and increased fees subsequently introduced in June 2020. A review of the *Forestry Act 1950* Forest Regulations 2013 was undertaken and amendments to the regulations and fees for camping, horse riding, fossicking and other activities proposed for consultation in early 2020-21.

In late 2019, as part of an international forest management mentoring and study program, ForestrySA hosted a forester from Nepal. ForestrySA also hosted the Duke of Edinburgh Awards 60th anniversary celebration in Mount Crawford and presented at the Primary Industries Education Foundation Australian Food and Fibre Roadshow.

In November 2019, ForestrySA became a member of the inter-agency "Opening up our Reservoirs" Taskforce. The project attracted \$25,000 to upgrade trail access through Mount Crawford Forest Reserve for visitors to explore and enjoy as part of the northern trails network.

As part of the government's Apiary Taskforce, ForestrySA led the way as the first public land manager to pilot the feasibility of commercial beekeeping on public land. The pilot will assess the compatibility of managed honeybees with forest and visitor management, providing significant long-term benefit for the apiary industry and the state.

An infrastructure upgrade plan was prepared for the popular Ghost Mushroom Lane visitor site in the Green Triangle, including plans for private operators to run tours. Unfortunately, COVID-19 forced cancellation of the annual event, however, plans are in place to reopen bigger and better in 2021.

A Green Triangle infrastructure review led to major upgrades at Hell's Hole and Lake Edward, and improvements to gates and signage within several Native Forest Reserves. Infrastructure initiatives in the Mount Lofty Ranges included new campground signage and upgrades at the Kuitpo Forest Information Centre, Tinjella Hut and The Old School House.

**Forests
alive**

Forests alive with activity
and busier than ever

**Online
bookings**

New camping,
accommodation and
permit system launched
May 2020

25,000

forest recreation
permits
purchased

5. SUMMARY - 2019-20 continued

Aligned with its marketing strategy, ForestrySA made significant website updates and launched an official Facebook page in May 2020, to enhance community engagement, education and awareness of commercial and community forestry, and recreation opportunities.

In May 2020, ForestrySA joined the government's Nature-based Tourism Co-investment Fund, a grant program designed to assist eligible businesses and organisations partner with the State Government to deliver sustainable, quality tourism experiences in South Australia. Several business proponents subsequently approached ForestrySA about potential opportunities for progression in 2020-21.

“2019-20 saw a focus on encouraging and facilitating nature-based activities and initiatives in South Australia's forest reserves, contributing to regional and local communities through the creation of sustainable economic opportunities.”

Native forest management prioritised cooperative multi-agency control programs, endangered species conservation, biodiversity corridors in partnership with schools and non-government conservation organisations, and ecological research.

Exceptional results were achieved through a multi-agency operation with the Department for Environment and Water and SA Water to remove more than 950 feral goats from the Cudlee Creek area following the December 2019 bushfire, highlighting the benefit of a cooperative approach to pest animal control.

Solid gains were made in biodiversity and threatened species conservation, with enhancement of the population and known range of the nationally-endangered orchid, *Thelymitra cyanapicata*, at Kuitpo Forest, and *Olearia pannosa* plantings in the Green Triangle. The southern bent-wing bat and Mount Lofty Ranges southern-brown bandicoot recovery programs also made positive progress.

ForestrySA continued its long history of supporting ecological research in Native Forest Reserves across the Mount Lofty Ranges and Green Triangle.

This includes work which will contribute to an understanding of how different flora and fauna species respond to fire across the landscape and the ecology and distribution of threatened shrub and woodland birds.

Despite COVID-19 restrictions, ForestrySA's schools program continued to deliver positive biodiversity conservation outcomes in the Green Triangle and for specific initiatives such as the red-tailed black-cockatoo recovery program.

It is essential ForestrySA continues to work in partnership with researchers, community groups, industry and government to ensure conservation and long-term sustainability of Native Forest Reserves within the broader landscape, as well as the diversity of habitats and species contained within.

Community use of forest reserves remained strong during 2019-20 with solid progress made in the area of community engagement, partnerships and programs such as Friends of the Forest.

More than 9,700 volunteer hours were contributed during the year and significant recreation, conservation and heritage outcomes delivered.

Volunteer groups also began development of new riding trail networks at Mount Gawler, Kuitpo and Second Valley in the Mount Lofty Ranges, and Mount Burr and Cave Range in the Green Triangle.

Successful outcomes achieved via the long-running
schools program

9,700
volunteer hours recorded

Facebook
official ForestrySA account launched for improved communication and engagement

5. SUMMARY - 2019-20 continued

Following the 2019 Cudlee Creek bushfire, a fire recovery plan was developed to facilitate salvage of affected pine plantation and recovery of native vegetation in the Cudlee Creek Forest Reserve and the popular Fox Creek Bike Park contained within.

Before the fire, the bike park featured 48km of multi-use trails, attracting 20,000 visitors a year and viewed as a key destination among mountain bike enthusiasts across Australia.

Hundreds of volunteer hours have been contributed by local mountain bike club members to clear and re-establish trails destroyed in the fire. The park will remain closed until after pine salvage operations are completed in early 2021.

ForestrySA also contributed as a member of the Cudlee Creek Local Recovery Committee and State Recovery Coordination Committee, championing the restoration and re-establishment of the area's commercial and recreational values and its representation in the Cudlee Creek Recovery Plan. This plan will frame the park as a state hub and national destination, bringing much-needed economic benefit to the surrounding fire-affected community.

A total of \$40,000 in grant funds received by local mountain bike groups was put towards development of the Cudlee Creek Forest Trails Fire Recovery Strategy, a trail audit and dangerous tree removal. The trail strategy was overseen by a steering committee of state and local government representatives and a reference group comprised of representatives from mountain bike and other recreation groups.

A yourSAy community engagement survey to help develop the recovery strategy received over 700 individual responses, a clear indication of the social and economic importance of the site.

In February 2020, ForestrySA partnered with Yankalilla Council to develop the Trails Strategic Action Plan. The plan focused on recreational opportunities and infrastructure development within the Second Valley Forest Reserve and includes the popular Ingalalla Falls picnic area, which was visited by more than 34,000 people in 2019-20.

Plans for multi-use and specific trails were also identified for delivery, beginning in 2020-21.

ForestrySA began a partnership with Naracoorte Lucindale Council for a multi-use trail connecting the Naracoorte township with Naracoorte Caves, via Cave Range Native Forest Reserve. Negotiations also began with a Mount Burr trails group to establish a trails network near the town.

Although many events were postponed towards the end of the year due to COVID-19 restrictions, ForestrySA was able to host 172 events and activities during 2019-20. These included trail bike events, the Adelaide Hills Car Rally and 2019 Pines Enduro motor rally in the Green Triangle.

Filming of the Mortal Kombat blockbuster from October 2019 transformed parts of the Mount Crawford Forest Reserve into a busy movie set, with approximately 350 people on site each day.

State Emergency Service, Country Fire Service, South Australia Police and the military continue to regularly use forest tracks and trails to conduct driver, orienteering and rescue training.



6. PROGRAM DELIVERY OUTCOMES

6.1 NATIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

This program supports the management of native vegetation on ForestrySA-managed land through the development and implementation of landscape-scale measures that protect and enhance biodiversity and heritage values. This includes native forests, but more broadly the protection of both Indigenous and European heritage sites that provide connections between people, events and our estate.

ForestrySA manages approximately 25,000ha of native forest and other areas of natural features, 16,059ha of which are gazetted as Native Forest Reserve under the *Forestry Act 1950*. Most of this native vegetation is surrounded by or adjacent to commercial softwood plantation, with more than 12,000ha located in the Green Triangle.

Native vegetation is managed primarily for the conservation of biodiversity values and contributes significantly to overall biodiversity conservation in South Australia. A diverse range of plants and animals are found, including a number of rare and threatened species. ForestrySA continues to undertake flora and fauna surveys and maintains species lists for each Native Forest Reserve.

Activities delivered under this program include:

- Native forest management
- Assessment of biodiversity values
- Pest plant and animal control
- Provision of natural history information to the public
- Collaboration for landscape scale outcomes
- Prescribed burning for ecological purposes.

Below: Springs Road Native Forest Reserve.



6.1 NATIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT continued

DELIVERY OUTCOMES

Threatened species monitoring and conservation

Solid gains were made in biodiversity and threatened species monitoring and conservation during the year.

A planting management plan for the nationally-endangered orchid, *Thelymitra cyanapicata*, at Meadows Flat, Kuitpo Forest, was developed in a bid to extend the known range of the species. As part of the endeavour, orchid seedlings were propagated by the Melbourne Botanic Gardens using seed collected from Knott Hill, the only known surviving population of the species.

In the Green Triangle, work was focused on increasing the populations and known ranges of endangered plant species including *Olearia pannosa*, *Allocasuarina mackliniana*, *Acacia suaveolens* and *Dianella callicarpa*. Plantings were carried out within several local biodiversity corridors, with assistance from Schools Biodiversity students and the Millicent Field Naturalists.

Monitoring of the southern bent-wing bat in the Green Triangle and southern brown bandicoot in the Mount Lofty Ranges also continued throughout the year, in conjunction with local environmental groups. ForestrySA also remains an active red-tailed black cockatoo Recovery Team member.

ForestrySA continues to support the work of a range of environmental and community groups, to monitor and research at-risk and declining bird, animal and plant populations within forest reserves.

Weed control

Noxious weed control was conducted in ForestrySA conservation and plantation areas at 83 locations across 955ha during 2019-20.

Key focus areas included control of post-bushfire weed intrusion across the Cudlee Creek Forest Reserve and asparagus weeds of significance.

A blackberry control program implemented across the Green Triangle achieved great success, with work completed at Kangaroo Flat, Marshes and Rock Shelter Native Forest Reserves. Control remains ongoing at the Pine, Wattle and Nangwarry Native Forest Reserves, while summer crew staff will complete control works at popular local visitor sites Lake Edward and Hell's Hole over the coming months.

Pest animal control

Control of feral animals remains a high priority for ongoing management of both plantation and Native Forest Reserves. ForestrySA's feral animal control program has become increasingly active since its recommencement in 2019, resulting in significant reduction in feral goats, deer and sheep numbers.

Exceptional results were also achieved through a multi-agency eradication program involving ForestrySA, SA Water and the Department for Environment and Water in late 2019-20. More than 950 feral goats were removed from the Cudlee Creek area in the wake of the December 2019 bushfire, highlighting the benefit of a cooperative approach to pest animal control.

Further success was achieved across the Kuitpo, Mount Crawford and Second Valley Forest Reserves, using the ongoing services of accredited pest controllers.

Prescribed burning

ForestrySA maintains a fuel reduction burn program in native forest in the Mount Lofty Ranges and Green Triangle.

These carefully planned burns remove under-storey fuel loads, assisting in bushfire prevention and promoting species diversity within the native forest ecosystem.

For more information on ForestrySA's Community Fire Protection program, see page 16.

6.1 NATIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT continued



Above: A ForestrySA Ranger stands on an illegally-cut motorbike trail in the Old Kersbrook Forest.

Illegal forest access and activity

ForestrySA continues to work strategically to reduce illegal activity in forest reserves, in the interest of native forest protection.

Despite active camera surveillance, information signage and regular forest ranger patrols in identified forest hot-spots, a significant rise in trespass activity by four-wheel drive and motorbike owners was recorded in the Mount Lofty Ranges during 2019-20.

Tens of thousands of dollars worth of damage has been caused to forest fencing, signage and associated infrastructure throughout the year, by drivers illegally forcing their way into the delicate native forest environment. An even greater environmental cost has been incurred by the forest itself by way of soil erosion, flora species loss and disturbance to resident fauna. This kind of activity also causes significant noise nuisance, disturbing our forest neighbours.

In the Green Triangle, ForestrySA is part of the new Intra-Agency and Forestry Management Liaison Group which is working to stamp out illegal firewood theft from native forests across the region. Alarmed by the ongoing environmental damage being caused by firewood thieves, the group of local land managers is working together to educate the community about the importance of using only sustainably sourced firewood.

Rubbish dumping in forest reserves remains a problem across the ForestrySA estate.

6.1 NATIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT continued

Community collaboration and representation

ForestrySA continues to work collaboratively with researchers, community groups, industry and government, in the interest of biodiversity conservation.

These working relationships help ensure conservation and long-term sustainability of Native Forest Reserves within the broader landscape, as well as the diversity of habitats and species contained within.

As a manager of significant amounts of public land containing native vegetation, ForestrySA also provides representation on a range of government and community groups, committees and taskforces. More detail can be found within the body of this document.

Opening up our Reservoirs Taskforce, Mount Crawford Forest

In November 2019, ForestrySA became a member of the inter-agency “Opening up our Reservoirs” Taskforce. The project attracted \$25,000 to upgrade trail access through Mount Crawford Forest Reserve for visitors to explore and enjoy, as part of the northern trails network. Visit www.reservoirs.sa.gov.au to find out more about the initiative.

South Australian Government’s Apiary Taskforce, Kuitpo Forest

As part of the government’s Apiary Taskforce, ForestrySA led the way as the first public land manager to pilot the feasibility of commercial beekeeping on public land. The pilot will assess the compatibility of managed honeybees with forest and visitor management, providing significant long-term benefit for the apiary industry and the state.

Biodiversity Schools Program, Green Triangle

ForestrySA’s Biodiversity Schools Program delivered a range of positive environmental and educational outcomes during 2019-20, despite the challenges presented by COVID-19.

The program has been running for well over a decade through a partnership with regional schools Millicent High School and the Glenburnie and Newbery Park Primary Schools. Tenison Woods College Poplars students also came on board during 2020.

Students are engaged in environmental learning through a range of projects in Native Forest Reserves, including ForestrySA’s longrunning Biodiversity Corridors Strategy. Tasks include the planting of native grasses in Biodiversity Corridors, native seed collection, recreation site maintenance and rubbish removal.

The schools have helped establish four new corridors during 2019-20, covering three locations across 18ha. More than 15,000 native seedlings have been propagated, with planting undertaken by students during winter.

This year, more than 2,500 students were engaged across the three schools, contributing 5,000 volunteer hours.

Below: Schools program participants assist with conservation and maintenance work at a Green Triangle forest site.



6.1 NATIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT continued

Biodiversity Corridors Strategy, Green Triangle

ForestrySA's Biodiversity Corridor Strategy has been operating across the wider Green Triangle estate since 2003, in an effort to link isolated pockets of native forest using strips of purpose-planted revegetation "corridors".

Biodiversity corridors are areas of vegetation that allow native animals to travel from one patch of native forest to another. A corridor provides shelter, food and protection from predators by imitating the structure and diversity of native vegetation. Birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals and insects that would otherwise be isolated in one native forest patch, can use these corridors to move between patches with relative ease and safety.

This year, the program focused on species monitoring, weed control and threatened species planting, which was carried out with assistance from Biodiversity Schools Program participants.

Community groups, the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) and TAFESA students have also been involved in the rehabilitation plan for threatened species, while ForestrySA also collaborates with Trees for Life for the recovery of the threatened species *Olearia pannosa*.

More than 16,500 plants have been planted in corridors this year, by both school and community groups. These community organisations have contributed more than 1,600 volunteer hours during 2019-20, in addition to the 5,000 hours contributed through the schools program.

Red-tailed black cockatoo Recovery Program, Green Triangle

ForestrySA continues to do its bit to ensure survival of the nationally-endangered red-tailed black-cockatoo in south eastern Australia, as part of the Red-tailed Black-cockatoo Recovery Program.

Brown stringybark plantings continued within ForestrySA biodiversity corridors to provide increased bird habitat, while preparation for new plantings began at the Wandilo Pasture Strip and former plantation land at Kangaroo Flat.

Field monitoring, tree and bird survival counts are also regularly carried out on ForestrySA land, in conjunction with Trees for Life and the Kids Helping Cockies Program.

International community forestry visit

ForestrySA hosted Nepalese forester, Madan Bashyal, as part of a University of Adelaide silviculture mentoring and study tour program in late 2019.

He was accompanied by University delegate Dr Edwin Cedamon, a post-doctoral fellow who spends substantial time in Nepal supporting the "EnLIFT2" community forestry project.

During the four-day visit to Mount Crawford, Kuitpo and Second Valley, Mr Bashyal gained insight into agroforestry trials in Gumeracha, prescribed burning sites and wildfire impacts from the 2015 Sampson Flat bushfire, management of conservation and recreation sites, thinning and harvesting operations, use of a drone for forest management and other silvicultural aspects of forest management.



Above: Nepali forester Madan Bashyal visits ForestrySA as part of a silviculture mentoring and study tour.

6.2 COMMUNITY USE OF FORESTS

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

ForestrySA-managed land provides the setting for a wide range of recreational activities including walking, nature studies, picnicking, camping, bike riding, cave diving and adventure caving, fossicking, horse riding and motor sport events.

ForestrySA's community use program enhances the visitor experience through provision and maintenance of a range of visitor facilities and opportunities, education and information.

Visitor facilities include exclusive-use forest huts and shelters, campgrounds, picnic areas, a network of multi-use tracks and trails, limestone caves and sinkholes and forest information centres.

ForestrySA is committed to the ongoing improvement of forest facilities and access, through implementation of an online accommodation and permit booking system, upgrades to visitor sites including Hell's Hole and Lake Edward in the Green Triangle and expansion and ongoing improvements at camping and accommodation venues in the Mount Lofty Ranges.

Forest recreation information and educational materials are also provided to the community via the ForestrySA Facebook page, forest signage, brochures, maps and the ForestrySA website, www.forestrysa.com.au.

Services delivered under this program include:

- Development and maintenance of appropriate visitor facilities
- Provision of forest information
- Management and permitting of forest events
- Compliance and education activities
- Visitor management
- Employment of Rangers to facilitate the above

ForestrySA's community-use program provides school groups and other organisations with opportunities to assist in the management of native forest reserves in a voluntary capacity and to learn more about the rich environmental, cultural and heritage values contained within them.

A wide range of recreational activities is managed in conjunction with commercial forestry operations to ensure the protection of environmental values.

Below: Visitor facility upgrades were completed at Lake Edward in the Green Triangle.



6.2 COMMUNITY USE OF FORESTS continued

DELIVERY OUTCOMES

Forest visitation and recreation

Forest visitation in the Mount Lofty Ranges and Green Triangle has reached new heights, following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions in May 2020.

The robust nature of the plantation forest environment allows ForestrySA to offer a variety of recreational opportunities to a wide range of forest users.

ForestrySA forest reserves are noticeably busier than ever, with forest visitor carparks regularly overflowing, vehicles lining the roads near popular recreation sites and forest information centres.

ForestrySA staff received almost 13,000 visitor inquiries via phone and email during the year (up from 8,000 in 2018-19). This 40% increase was due to the launch of ForestrySA's new online booking system and relaxation of government COVID-19 restrictions in May 2020.

Activities such as camping, bike riding, horse riding, bush walking, picnicking and fossicking have been popular in the Mount Lofty Ranges, with day visitors flocking in unprecedented numbers. Cave diving, adventure caving and bushwalking remain popular in the Green Triangle.

More than 25,000 people purchased permits for forest activities such as cave diving, adventure caving, fossicking, horse riding, events and camping during 2019-20.

This highlights the importance of the natural forest environment for social and mental health and wellbeing, through recreational activities, events, research and conservation.

Camping and accommodation

ForestrySA recorded a 400% increase in campsite bookings at the start of the season, due to its delayed start on 15 May 2020. More than 4,700 campsite bookings were received in June 2020 compared with 1,470 the previous period.

ForestrySA operates three designated campgrounds in the Mount Lofty Ranges - Kuitpo Forest's Chookarloo and Mount Crawford's Chalk's and Rocky Paddock Campgrounds.

ForestrySA also manages a range of hut, cottage and camp shelter accommodation venues within the picturesque bush settings of the Kuitpo and Mount Crawford Forest Reserves. All are available for overnight stays during the annual camping season.

More than 14,500 visitors have stayed overnight in one of ForestrySA's forest campground or accommodation venues since the camping season began. These campgrounds and accommodation venues cater for up to 1,030 people per night and have been at capacity each weekend since they reopened.

Below: Campers at Chookarloo Campground, Kuitpo Forest.



6.2 COMMUNITY USE OF FORESTS continued

Event management

A wide variety of community and private events are held within ForestrySA forest reserves annually.

ForestrySA provides forest access for user groups, clubs, organisations and individuals, for events such as fetes, wedding ceremonies, festivals, markets and state and national level sporting competitions.

A total of 172 events were held in ForestrySA forest reserves across the Mount Lofty Ranges and Green Triangle during 2019-20.

This included filming of the Mortal Kombat blockbuster film from October 2019, which transformed parts of the Mount Crawford Forest Reserve into a busy movie set, with approximately 350 people on site each day.

State Emergency Service, Country Fire Service, South Australia Police and the military also continued to regularly use forest tracks and trails for driver, orienteering and rescue training.

Unfortunately the year's event numbers were down significantly on the previous period (244 events were held in 2018-19), as a direct result of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020. Many scheduled forest events were postponed or cancelled, including Kuitpo's Nature Play Forest Festival, the Bike SA Dirty Weekend, Birdwood Farm Day and Ghost Mushroom Lane.

Offsetting this, inquiries from event organisers increased dramatically upon the easing of government restrictions from May 2020, with many events now in the planning stages.



ForestrySA's new booking system allows visitors to secure permits for activities such as diving at Nettlebed Cave (above) online.

Online permit, camping and accommodation booking system

ForestrySA's online camping and accommodation booking and recreation permit systems went live via www.forestrysa.com.au in late May, following the easing of government COVID-19 restrictions.

The system provides streamlined access to ForestrySA recreation sites, with all accommodation and camping venues available for online viewing, reservation and payment.

Community feedback has been very positive, as forest visitors can now view site maps and secure a campsite or venue well in advance of their stay.

Permits for popular forest activities including horse riding, cave diving and fossicking were made available online from January 2020. Similarly, event application forms can be obtained via the ForestrySA website, catering for the wide variety of community and private events held in forest reserves each year.

6.2 COMMUNITY USE OF FORESTS continued

Volunteers and community engagement

Volunteers contributed almost 10,000 hours to forest maintenance, improvement of recreational facilities and conservation endeavours during 2019-20.

Those engaged included school and TAFE students, Friends of the Forests, the Department of Correctional Services and a host of other community and forest user groups and individuals.

Tasks undertaken included field studies, native flora and fauna monitoring and surveys, pest animal control, wild pine and weed control, mountain bike trail maintenance, forest infrastructure repair and maintenance, and rubbish collection and removal.

Upgrades to visitor infrastructure and forest facilities

Significant work has been carried out to upgrade visitor infrastructure at popular Green Triangle visitor sites Hell's Hole and Lake Edward. Work undertaken includes improved car parking, new visitor information signage, maps and walking trails, while an engineering audit has also been completed on infrastructure at a number of sites.

Planning was also conducted at Dry Creek, ahead of upgrades scheduled for 2020-21.

In the Mount Lofty Ranges, work began to formalise and expand the trail network, bike riding facilities and opportunities at Kersbrook, Pewsey Vale and Bennett's.

Volunteer trail builders were engaged to begin on-ground works at all three sites, while a trail audit was also arranged in preparation for a new Kersbrook Trail Management Plan.

Cudlee Creek bushfire recovery - Fox Creek Bike Park

ForestrySA's Cudlee Creek Forest Reserve and popular Fox Creek Bike Park were badly damaged in the December 2019 Cudlee Creek Bushfire.

Prior to the fire, Fox Creek was the most popular and well-used mountain bike facility in Adelaide's Mount Lofty Ranges, attracting 20,000 people per year.

The forest was closed to visitors immediately following the fire in the interest of public safety, with closure signage erected, public information disseminated via media, web and social media, and forest patrols were increased.

Since then, ForestrySA fire recovery has been focused on the clearing of fire tracks and dangerous trees with assistance of the Australian Defence Force, consultation with State and Local Government and key stakeholders, securement of grant funding, preparation of a Cudlee Creek Forest Trails Fire Recovery Strategy, boundary fencing restoration and a full trail audit.

Fire salvage harvest operations in commercial pine plantation are also ongoing and due to conclude in January 2021. Volunteers have also dedicated countless hours to ongoing site clean-up.

ForestrySA continues to work collaboratively with neighbours, mountain bike clubs and other key stakeholders to advance the fire recovery process and build back better at Fox Creek.

Clean-up has continued at Cudlee Creek Forest Reserve (below) in the wake of the bushfire, with assistance from the Australian Defence Force and volunteers.



6.2 COMMUNITY USE OF FORESTS continued

Nature-based Tourism Co-investment Fund

ForestrySA has successfully collaborated with the State Government to be included in its new co-investment fund. The fund will provide grants to organisations to partner with the State Government to deliver sustainable, quality tourism experiences in the state.

ForestrySA is looking forward to hearing new ideas to expand the range of nature-based tourism offerings in forest reserves across the Mount Lofty Ranges and Green Triangle.

Visit www.coinvest.parks.sa.gov.au to find out more about the new co-investment fund initiative.

Changes to non-regulated forest recreation fees

ForestrySA is committed to supporting and facilitating nature-based activities and events in our forest reserves, which contribute positively to the health and well-being of local people, businesses, communities and the economy.

Each year, ForestrySA dedicates significant time to processing application requests along with maintaining and enhancing the extensive trail network and recreational facilities available within forest reserves.

A review of ForestrySA's recreational fees presented opportunity to better reflect costs associated with administration, on-ground support and associated facility maintenance and necessary upgrades.

For the first time in 20 years, fees were increased, noting they remain reasonable and cost-effective. The new fees came into effect on 1 June 2020. Key stakeholders and community members were consulted extensively throughout the process.

Below: Horse riders in Kuitpo Forest.



6.3 FOREST INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Research and the dissemination of information for the benefit of the state and the forestry industry, including forestry demonstration and gene conservation plantings, are at the core of ForestrySA's industry development program.

Activities include:

- Projects to improve forest productivity and sustainable forest management
- Provision of information and communication services (fact sheets, articles, field days)
- Management of forestry demonstration and gene conservation areas.

Forest Research Mount Gambier is a partnership between the University of South Australia, the forest industry, the Federal Government and the Government of South Australia, facilitated by ForestrySA. It is located at UniSA's Mount Gambier Campus, assisting in delivery of regional priorities of the National Institute for Forest Products Innovation (NIFPI), supporting South Australia's \$1.2b forest industry. The partnership will create a strategic alliance to leverage outcomes and provide highly skilled research resources to address forest industry needs. Forest Research Mount Gambier plays a vital role in fostering collaboration, supporting research, boosting innovation and maintaining jobs while making Mount Gambier one of the major centres for forest industry research in the country.

The forest industry development program undertakes research projects in defined areas of interest with priority areas identified from a number of published research strategies. Priority areas for research have been identified using information published by organisations such as Forest and Wood Products Australia and through consultation with industry.

Areas of research conducted under the MoAA include:

- Environmental impacts
- Tree improvement and genetics
- Product improvement and innovation
- Climate change and bioenergy.

DELIVERY OUTCOMES

Forest Research Mount Gambier continues to progress nationally significant projects for the benefit of the forest industry as a whole.

ForestrySA has continued to provide support in 2019-20, through financial contributions from Community Services Obligation funding and collaboration in areas of interest, including:

- Scoping an automated forest fire detection and suppression framework
- Solutions for the optimal use of dense, remotely acquired data by forest growers
- Optimising the management of plantation, water and environmental assets
- Development of best-practice fatigue management for the Australian forestry industry.

Other research trials of note:

- ForestrySA continues to work with South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) and other organisations to assist Spring Gully Foods with a Manuka honey trial site in the Wirrabara Forest Reserve.
- In partnership with Tree Breeding Australia, ForestrySA is establishing a genetic gains trial in the Mount Crawford Forest with the objective of identifying progeny best suited to drier areas.
- A *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* seed source trial has been continued, aiming to determine its suitability for farm forestry application.

6.4 COMMUNITY FIRE PROTECTION

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

ForestrySA's integrated fire activities include protection of commercial plantation, native forest and a commitment to fire protection activities to support local communities. This CSO program supports activities beyond the protection of ForestrySA's commercial assets.

ForestrySA maintains and operates a network of fire spotting towers in the Green Triangle, which provide early detection of fires occurring on both ForestrySA land, and on other plantation growers' land and farmland.

A fire tower at Mount Crawford is activated on days of high fire danger. ForestrySA fire crews respond to fires occurring on ForestrySA managed land, other forest owners' land and on neighbouring properties within defined response zones.

ForestrySA may provide trained incident management personnel to assist with the management of fires at the request of the Country Fire Service.

Community fire protection is enhanced through annual fire break and track maintenance programs, prescribed burning and protection work which is carried out across ForestrySA-managed land.

This on-ground work covers over 1,000ha each year and involves slashing, grading, herbicide application and ploughing to reduce contiguous fuel levels and potentially dangerous fuel loads.

DELIVERY OUTCOMES

ForestrySA remained committed to bushfire prevention, preparedness and response, working in cooperation with South Australia's Country Fire Service (CFS) and Victoria's Country Fire Authority (CFA), other forest managers, neighbouring landholders and stakeholders to help manage the threat and response to bushfire.

ForestrySA continued to play a key role in fire management on public lands during 2019-20, remaining an active participant in national and state fire management strategy, policy and initiatives to enhance public safety.

This included membership of the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council, the State Bushfire Coordination Committee, relevant Bushfire Management Committees and the Heads of Agencies Fire Cooperative.

ForestrySA maintained strong partnerships with the Forest Owners Conference and the Green Triangle Fire Alliance, supporting a cooperative approach to forest fire management across the South East of South Australia.

ForestrySA made a submission to the Independent Review of the South Australian 2019-20 Bushfire Season, with review recommendations applicable to ForestrySA identified for implementation in 2020-21.

This was followed by a comprehensive submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

Fire response

ForestrySA remains a registered CFS brigade in both the Mount Lofty Ranges and Green Triangle. A well-maintained firefighting fleet and equipment is bolstered by seasonal crew members trained in forest firefighting.

ForestrySA fire crews attended 19 fires in the Mount Lofty Ranges during the 2019-20 fire season. Of these, 11 were on land owned or managed by ForestrySA.

Crews responded to a further seven fires in the Green Triangle during the season, with two of these fires on land owned or managed by ForestrySA. A total of 380 standby hours were also recorded in ForestrySA's local fire towers, assisting in rapid fire detection.

The 2019-20 season got off to one of the busiest starts on records, with ForestrySA fire crews responding to significant fires in the Mount Lofty Ranges and Green Triangle between 20 December 2019 and 9 January 2020.

The December 2019 Cudlee Creek bushfire was the single largest fire attended by ForestrySA crews for season 2019-20. ForestrySA personnel were present on the fireground for 12 days (on both private and public lands), while continuing to maintain fire coverage across the Kuitpo and Mount Crawford Forest Reserves.

More than 102ha of ForestrySA plantation and 350ha of native bushland was affected, resulting in \$1m damage to plantation forest assets and infrastructure. The fire also resulted in closure of the popular Fox Creek Bike Park and wider Cudlee Creek trail network.

In the Green Triangle the largest fire of the season occurred within ForestrySA's Heath Native Forest Reserve during December 2019. The fire affected 240ha and was attended by ForestrySA fire crews for two weeks.

6.4 COMMUNITY FIRE PROTECTION continued

Fire risk management

ForestrySA continued to maintain forest management plans as a means of safeguarding commercial interests and fulfilling community protection obligations, incorporating clear risk mitigation measures for fire management and protection of plantation forest and Native Forest Reserve.

ForestrySA also contributed to a program of strategic fuel reduction and bushfire response on public and private land across South Australia.

All required industry standards for plantation maintenance and broader pre-season fire preparedness measures were implemented during 2019-20. This included on-ground works, and residue and prescribed burning for hazard management.

ForestrySA's 2019-20 annual fuel reduction burn program consisted of residue and prescribed burns in both plantation and native forests, reducing fuel loads across 309ha in the Mount Lofty Ranges and Green Triangle.

Fire tower network infrastructure assessment

A fire tower network infrastructure assessment and maintenance plan was completed in early 2020, to identify safety and structural issues related to fire detection assets for forest industry and communities in the Green Triangle.

Investigation of alternative fire detection strategies and technologies also began, in partnership with industry and the University of South Australia.

Below: Prescribed burning operations in native forest.



6.5 MANAGEMENT OF THE MID NORTH FORESTS

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

ForestrySA continues to support transition of the Mid North Forests to new management, as part of the Mid North Forests Future Strategy.

DELIVERY OUTCOMES

ForestrySA continued to work with PIRSA to administer Crown leases and licences in the Mid North during 2019-20.

Some contribution to fire protection still remains a responsibility of ForestrySA in the form of pre-Fire Danger Season checks to ensure leaseholders have adequately addressed the required fire protection maintenance.

ForestrySA continues to work collaboratively to assist Spring Gully Foods with a Manuka honey trial production site at Mount Ellen, in Wirrabara Forest Reserve.

Recently, ForestrySA worked with representatives of the BFCAA to deliver posts and signage for installation along sections of the Heysen and Mawson Walking Trails. Interpretive signage will also be developed and other legacy commitments addressed.

ForestrySA continues to support the Bundaleer Forest Community Areas Association, providing closure signage when the Bundaleer Picnic Ground was temporarily closed due to COVID-19.

Grant funding was also approved by the Office of Recreation and Sport for payment to the group via ForestrySA, while a successful tree planting day was held on 16 May 2020.



ForestrySA

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