



Report of large old trees and old growth forest in coupe 889-506-0019 ('Spotty')

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This report provides evidence that VicForests are currently logging in coupe 889-506-0019 ('Spotty'), at Granite Mountain, East Gippsland, despite the presence of a number of large old trees, and a significant area of old growth forest within the coupe boundary. On 3 November seven large trees were measured throughout the coupe.

One of the trees was measured at 2.64m DBH, which must be protected according to the Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio's policy to protect all large old trees above 2.5m DBH. A coupe plan and accompanying operations map of coupe 889-506-0019 ('Spotty') was provided to GECO by VicForests. The operations map shows that none of the large trees have been marked and only some have been included in "proposed exclusion areas".

As VicForests' coupe plan and operations map for coupe 889-506-0019 ('Spotty') does not comply with section 2.3 of the Management Standards and Procedures (MSP), including sections 2.3.1.1 (h) and 2.3.1.2 (b) the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) must issue a direction under Section 70 of the 'Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004' requiring VicForests to cease logging operations within the coupe until their coupe plan and map comply with the MSPs.

The adjacent coupe 'Wheel', coupe 889-506-0033, was not surveyed on this occasion, but in all likelihood, it may also contain large old trees which may not have been marked for retention. Old growth forest contiguous with the areas observed within 889-506-0019 ('Spotty') may also be present.

In an ABC news article in 2017¹, the minister said that the new large old tree protection rules would require buffers;

"It's not just about the old trees, there is a requirement that the understory cluster associated with habitat trees will also be protected, [with the] understanding that trees on their own don't tell the full story of what goes on in forests."

¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-01/blockade-halts-logging-in-victoria/9106790>

A small sample of the large old trees within the coupe were measured and photographed, they are listed in the table below;

Large Tree	Waypoint ID	DBH	Species
LT 01	TIGLT01	2.42m	<i>E. fastigata</i>
LT 02	TIGLT02	2.64m	<i>E. cypellocarpa</i>
LT 03	TIGLT03	2.13m	<i>E. cypellocarpa</i>
LT 04	TIGLT04	2.04m	<i>E. cypellocarpa</i>
LT 05	TIGLT05	2.34m	<i>E. cypellocarpa</i>
LT 06	TIGLT06	2.29m	<i>E. sieberi</i>
LT 07	TIGLT07	2.09m	<i>E. cypellocarpa</i>

The largest tree measured as greater than 2.5m DBH has not been marked for retention in the field, nor has a buffer been marked with flagging tape. VicForests are not complying with the Minister's announcement that all old trees will be protected. By not including a buffer, even if the tree itself is not cut down, it will be subject to a heightened risk that it will die following the post logging burn, or from exposure while left standing isolated in the clearfell logged coupe. Retaining a single large tree without surrounding forest has little conservation value compared to the retention of a large tree in undamaged forest. It is critical that the surrounding forest is also protected to ensure the tree's survival and the important relationship between large trees and the surrounding understorey.

Many more large old trees were observed in the coupe however due to time constraints they were not measured during our recent survey. None of the trees listed in the table above, or the others seen, were marked for retention in the field and the area is currently being logged.

Figure 1 below shows a detail of VicForests' operations map with records from DELWP's 'Forest Protection Survey Program', which shows at least two trees greater than 2.5metres are not included in exclusion areas. Further, no trees greater than 2.5metres or other conservation values were shown on VicForests' operations map.

The "proposed exclusion areas" that are shown on the operations map are extremely small and do not adequately protect the high conservation values they propose to. We also note that these protection areas are not applied to the locations where a threatened Sooty Owl and Long-footed Potoroo were found. The owl 'roosting or nesting site' which was recorded was only given an approximate <15m buffer.

This area has never been intensively logged and only lower intensity fire was observed. The presence of many senescent, large, hollow-bearing trees, an intact and diverse mid and understorey that is ecologically mature, indicate this area is old growth forest.

According to the VicForests' Coupe Plan an old growth field verification assessment was completed, but we do not believe this method accurately detects old growth forest. VicForests' old growth field verification method is completely inadequate and cannot be relied upon to find old growth, as it changes the definition of old growth to declassify and redefine old growth forests.

Coupes 'Spotty' (889-506-0019), and the adjacent coupe 'Wheel' (889-506-0033), have no prior logging history, and are a refuge of old forests at Granite Mountain in an area where older forests are now heavily depleted. Following the Environment Minister D'Ambrosio and the Premier Andrews' announcement on 7 November regarding the immediate protection of old growth forest, the logging in this area of forest must be stopped.

We urge you to take the following actions regarding the above information;

- Issue a direction to VicForests under Section 70 of the 'Sustainable Forests (Timber) Act 2004' to stop continued logging in coupes 889-506-0019 & 889-506-0033 until all large old trees have been marked for protection on the coupe plan maps and given buffers in the field;
- Stop continued logging of old growth forest in coupe 889-506-0019 until a proper field verification tool is developed by independent ecologists, in consultation with environment groups, to ensure areas of old growth forest outside the current mapping are not logged.

Please see below for photographs of the trees detailed in the table above, the old growth forests in coupe 889-506-0019 ('Spotty'), and a detail of VicForests' operations map with records from DELWP's 'Forest Protection Survey Program'. We cannot further stress the urgency of this matter and are asking you to act immediately to stop logging operations in this area of forest. We look forward to your timely response.

Regards,

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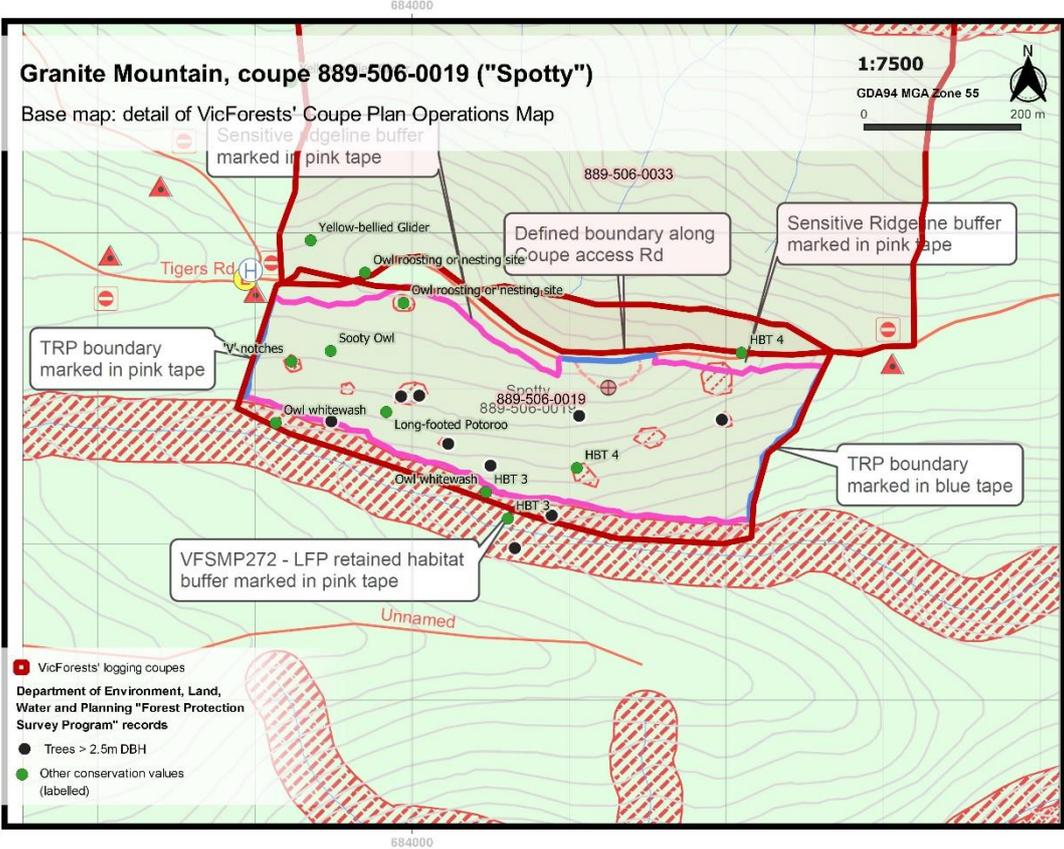
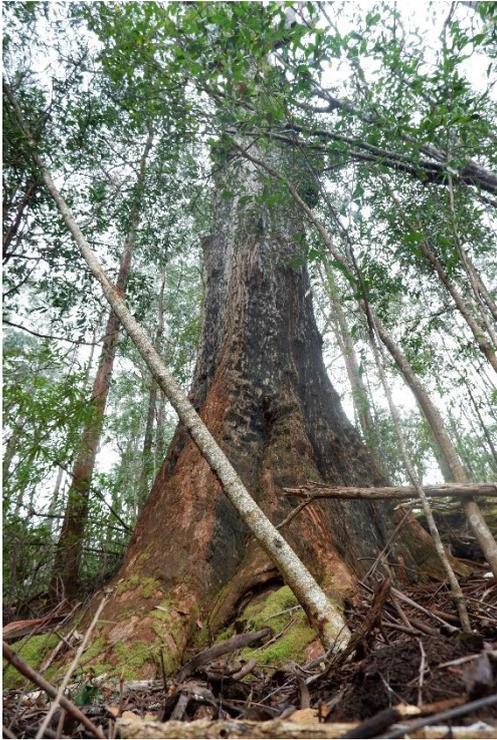
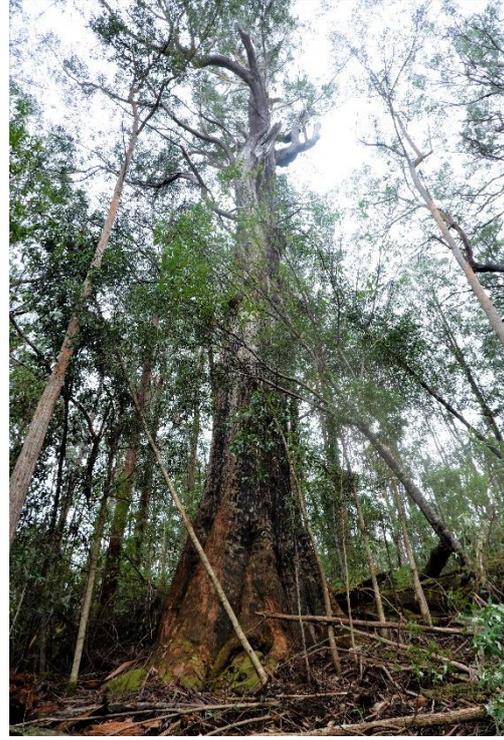


Figure 1

Photographs of large old trees in coupe 889-506-0019 ('Spotty')



Waypoint ID; TIGLT01, 2.42m DBH



Waypoint ID; TIGLT02, 2.64m DBH





Waypoint ID; TIGLT03, 2.13m DBH



Waypoint ID; TIGLT04, 2.04m DBH





Waypoint ID; TIGLT05, 2.34m DBH



Waypoint ID; TIGLT06, 2.29m DBH





Waypoint ID; TIGLT07, 2.09m DBH

Photos of Old Growth forest in coupe 889-506-0019 ('Spotty') currently being logged





