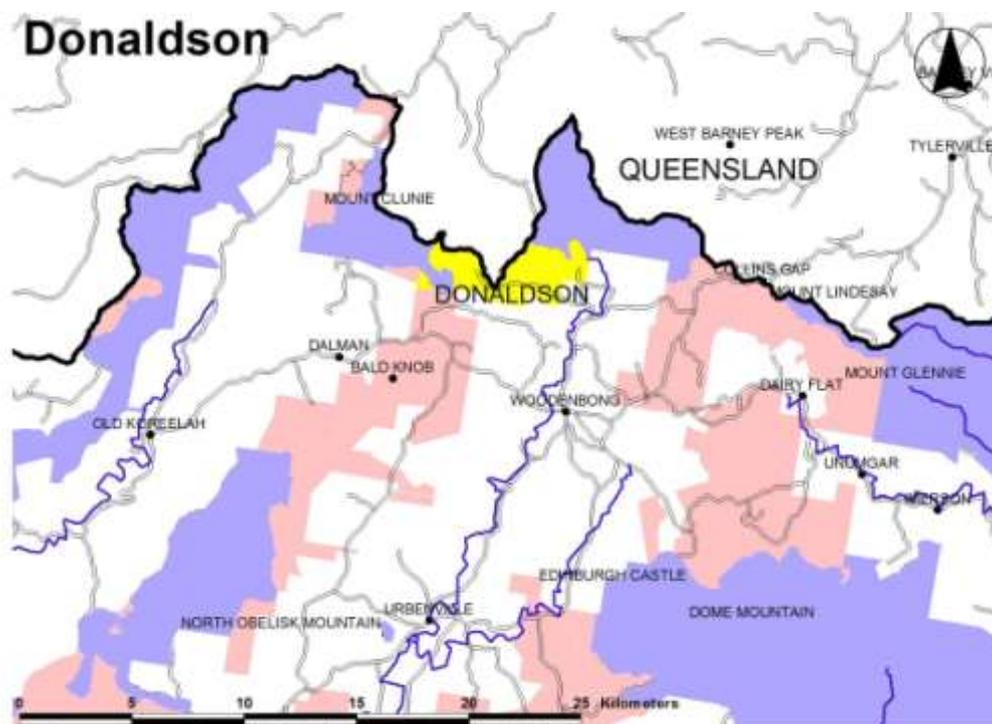


Initial Assessment

Donaldson State Forest

North East Forest Alliance May 2014



The North East Forest Alliance undertook a brief inspection of compartments 36 and 42, and other forests in the vicinity of Border Road, in Donaldson State Forest on 11 May 2014. As a result of this inspection the following recommendations are made:

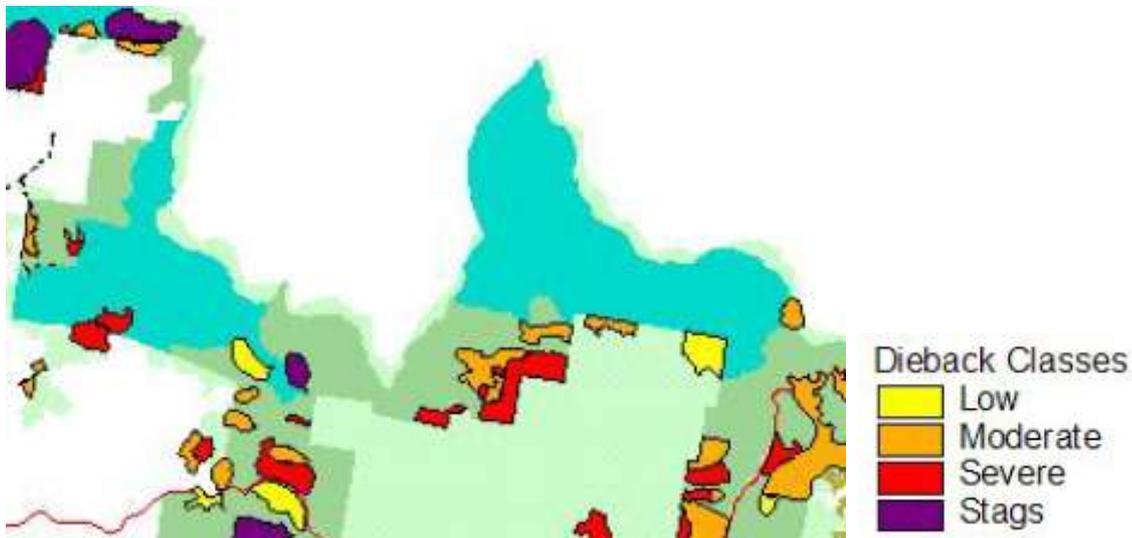
1. Given the rampant Bell Miner Associated Dieback at lower elevations in compartments 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48 and 49, the abject failure of rehabilitation trials in compartments 44-49, the yet limited occurrences in compartments 36 and 42, and the high susceptibility of these forests to lantana invasion and BMAD that no logging should take place until:
 - a. The extent and severity of BMAD in compartments 36 and 42 is fully and accurately mapped;
 - b. The area of susceptible forest types is clearly delineated;
 - c. An explicit management and rehabilitation strategy is identified for affected and susceptible areas; and
 - d. Sufficient resources are available to immediately undertake and monitor required rehabilitation works.
2. NEFA considers that the integrity of the rabbit fence is required to be immediately restored and that disciplinary action should be taken against those responsible for removing the fence and leaving it open.
3. NEFA considers that a professional botanist should be employed to survey for and map any occurrences of the Endangered Ecological Communities White Gum Moist Forest and Grey Box-Grey Gum Wet Sclerophyll Forest.
4. NEFA considers that compartment 42 qualifies as intermediate Koala habitat and, given the widespread occurrence of Tallowwood through the area, it is likely that Koala High Use Areas occur within compartments 36 and 42 and should be thoroughly searched for.
5. NEFA considers that the Forestry Corporation should implement the default prescriptions for Giant Barred Frog, Albert's Lyrebird, Marbled Frogmouth, and Golden-tipped Bat (ie expand filter strips along all streams by 10m throughout these compartments) or undertake adequate surveys for them.
6. The *Philoria* sp likely to occur here is currently thought to be a new undescribed species and must be adequately surveyed for before logging along with the Rufous Scrub Bird.
7. Given the large numbers of oldgrowth trees, NEFA considers that Greater Glider densities are likely to be found to be greater than 1 per ha in many parts of the area and that hollow-bearing tree retention should be increased to 8 per hectare.
8. At crossing C the fill bulldozed into the stream, along with the gully stuffer, should be removed immediately. Disciplinary action should be taken against those responsible for this environmental vandalism.
9. At crossing D the earthen causeway needs to be removed and the natural form of the creek-bed re-established.
10. NEFA considers that a Pre-Logging And Pre-Roading Aquatic Habitat Assessment must be prepared in accordance with Condition 9 of the Fisheries Licence.

We look forward to the Forestry Corporation and EPA's responses to these recommendations.

Bell Miner Associated Dieback

Donaldson and Mt Lindesay State Forests have been identified as two of the State Forests most affected by Bell Miner Associated Dieback in NSW. The full extent of dieback has not been identified in Donaldson compartments 36-49 or it has significantly deteriorated since 2004.

FORESTRY CORPORATION 2004 MAPPING OF BELL MINER ASSOCIATED DIEBACK



The harvesting plan for compartments 36 and 42 identifies that BMAD is already present in the heart of compartment 42.

Health

Dieback (BMAD) is evident in various levels across parts of the harvest area, particularly around dumps 7 and 9. In affected areas sites are understocked and trees have thin crowns. There are numerous dead stags scattered across the harvest area. In affected areas understorey is predominately lantana under more open canopy and there is little healthy regrowth or potential for regrowth in the current state.

Sections of the operational area are heavily infested with lantana. Operators are to conduct visual inspections and clean machinery if required when moving from weeded areas to non-weeded area.

NEFA's inspection also found an outbreak in the heart of compartment 36 in the valley between log dumps 1 and 2. Patches of lantana are also more widespread, meaning that many areas not currently suffering are already susceptible to BMAD. The forest type Blue Gum-tallowwood is identified as a susceptible forest type, with Blue Gum particularly vulnerable.

Bell Miner Associated Dieback is already rampant at lower elevations in compartments 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, and 49. The outbreaks at lower elevations in Donaldson 44-49 were subject to rehabilitation trials in the mid 2000s. St.Clair (2009) reports on the Donaldson trials:

... In a previous project at Donaldson SF it was found that the most severe treatment (mechanical disturbance and hot fire) produced a greater reduction in bell miner numbers and increase in other bird species than did either burning alone or herbicide spraying alone (Mews 2006). ...

A previous fire and mechanical clearing trial in a declining stand of Forest Red Gum in Donaldson SF virtually eliminated lantana and produced a proliferation of fire succession species (mainly native peach and wattle) similar to the more intense fire treatment in this study. There was insufficient eucalypt regeneration to restore a forest canopy (Shipman 2007). Shipman (2007) reported that 32 % of 60 plots had no eucalypt regeneration, 36 % had a stocking of 250 stems ha⁻¹ and only 32 % had a stocking of 500 stems ha⁻¹ or more.

St.Clair 2009 reports on the outcomes of the Mt. Lindesay trials only two years after they were undertaken. The treatments involved logging, spraying lantana, burning and planting: He found:

- Within 2 years Bell Miner numbers had recovered to pre-treatment levels,
- lantana showed significant recovery in moderate and high intensity fire treatments within a year, though had not yet recovered to pre-treatment levels
- the treatments did not improve the health of the retained trees
- treated areas performed worse than untreated controls
- regeneration of eucalypts was inadequate at most sites

The visual evidence from our observations in compartments 45 and 46 on this inspection are that the trials were an abject failure and the forests remain in a parlous state.



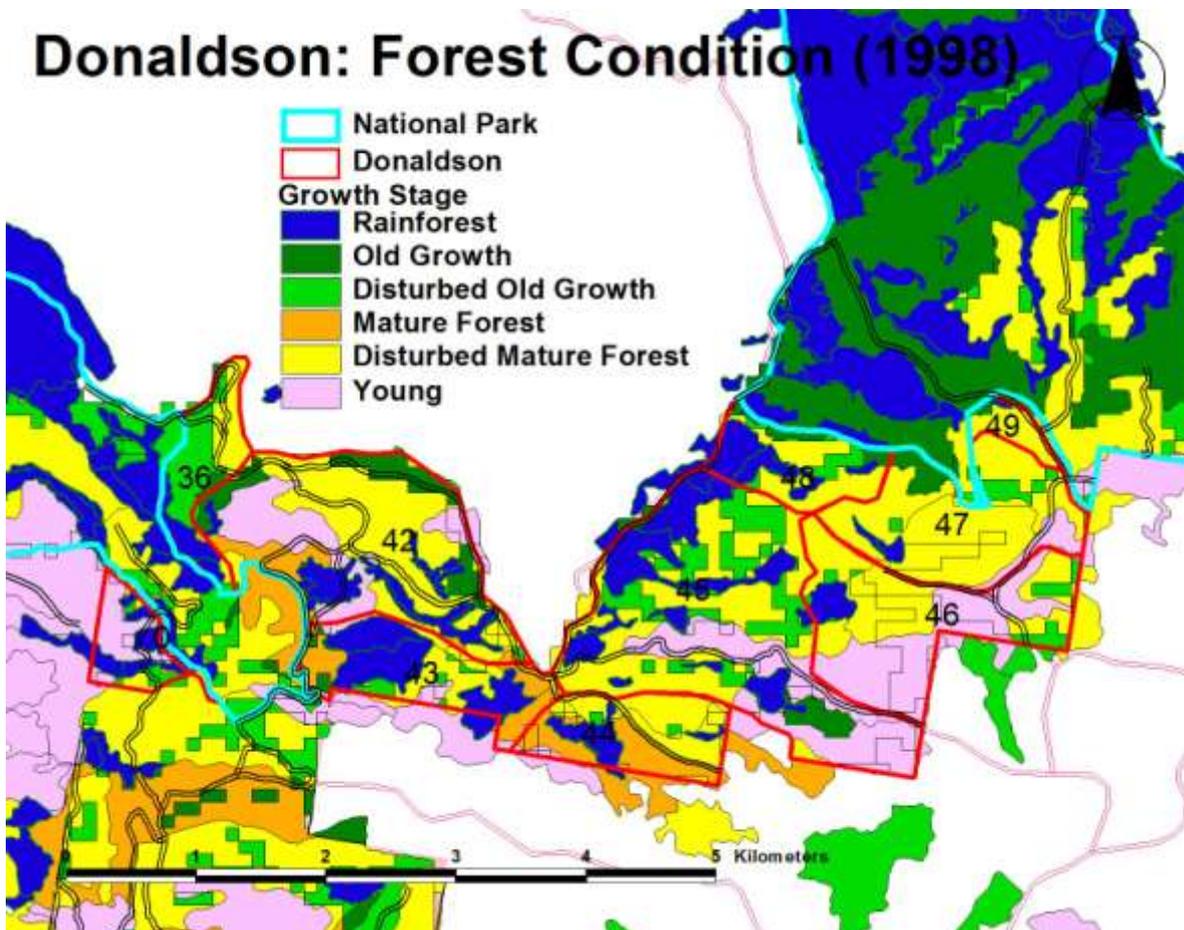
BMAD rehabilitation area in compartments 45 and 46 of Donaldson State Forest. Rehabilitation efforts were an abject failure. Note the lantana understorey and dead and dying trees. Bell Miners were in large numbers and totally controlled these areas to the exclusion of most other birds. It is a destroyed ecosystem.



BMAD has extended from lower elevations up the valleys and ridges, affecting most of the forests identified as “young” in the vicinity of the Border Road up to compartment 42.

In these areas it is those forests identified as “young forest”, ie most heavily logged, that are apparently the most vulnerable to BMAD.

Donaldson: Forest Condition (1998)



The Harvesting Plan fails to identify the extent and severity of BMAD within compartments 36 and 42. There is no attempt to identify a management program to ensure that dieback areas are rehabilitated or that it is not spread by logging into susceptible areas. A rehabilitation plan is not proposed to be prepared.

Given the rampant Bell Miner Associated Dieback at lower elevations in compartments 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48 and 49, the abject failure of rehabilitation trials in compartments 44-49, the yet limited occurrences in compartments 36 and 42, and the high susceptibility of these forests to lantana invasion and BMAD that no logging should take place until:

- **The extent and severity of BMAD in compartments 36 and 42 is fully and accurately mapped;**
- **The area of susceptible forest types is clearly delineated;**
- **An explicit management and rehabilitation strategy is identified for affected and susceptible areas; and**
- **Sufficient resources are available to immediately undertake and monitor required rehabilitation works.**

Rabbit Fence

It was astounding to find that seven sections of the Rabbit Fence had been completely removed with the fence posts removed, wire cut, and mesh pulled out of the ground. These sections had apparently been left open for some time as the machinery was deployed elsewhere and there were no fencing materials in the vicinity indicating that the Forestry Corporation has no intent to restore the integrity of the fence in the immediate future. This was apparently done so that the road could be upgraded to allow log trucks to use it and the fence realigned. Surprisingly sections had been removed along the "Non haulage road" between dumps 4 and 12.

- **No tree heads or debris to be left along fence line. The SFO will supervise the contractor to undertake works required by the Rabbit Board Officer whilst along the fence line and jointly with the contractor effect immediate repairs to the fence if accidentally damaged.**

NEFA considers that the integrity of the rabbit fence is required to be immediately restored and that disciplinary action should be taken against those responsible for removing the fence and leaving it open.



Two of 7 sections of the border rabbit proof fence removed and left open, note the writing on tree
“Move Fence”

Dunns White Gum

An unmapped stand of White Gum Moist Forest was observed adjacent to 43/1 road at 457021 6865618.

NEFA considers that a professional botanist should be employed to survey for and map any occurrences of the Endangered Ecological Communities White Gum Moist Forest and Grey Box-Grey Gum Wet Sclerophyll Forest.

Fauna

Given the high site quality, abundance of oldgrowth trees and nearby records it is apparent from the paucity of records in the compartment that no adequate fauna survey has been undertaken in compartments 42 and 36.

The Koala has been recorded in the area, with one record identified on the Harvesting Plan.. During this inspection 3 sites were checked for Koala scats. 2 scats were found under a Tallowwood at the second site. 1-5 scats were found under 4 trees at the third site (2 Scats 456939 6866593, 1 scat 456963 6866562, 2 scats 456967 6866541, 5 scats 457025 6866536).

NEFA considers that compartment 42 qualifies as intermediate Koala habitat and, given the widespread occurrence of Tallowwood through the area, it is likely that Koala High Use Areas occur within compartments 36 and 42 and should be thoroughly searched for.



The only other records the Forestry Corporation has of threatened species in compartments 36 and 42 are Yellow-bellied Glider, Rose-crowned Fruit Dove and Wompoo Fruit Dove.

In addition to these species Golden-tipped Bat, Common-bent Winged Bat, Eastern False Pipistrelle Bat, Glossy Black Cockatoo and Masked Owl have been recorded in compartments 44-49 and are highly likely to occur with compartments 36 and 42.

There are also historical records of Tiger Quoll, Giant Barred Frog, *Phyloria sp.*, Albert's Lyrebird, Black Striped Wallaby, and Long-nosed Potoroo in compartments 44-49 that the Forestry Corporation ignored (because of age?) and didn't relocate. Unless the Forestry Corporation's gross mismanagement has wiped them out in compartments 44-49 they are likely to occur within both areas.

Both *Mixophes fleayi* and *iteratus* have been recorded from Grahams creek (which drains compartments 36 and 42) so they are likely to be present. The *Phyloria sp* occurring here was recently reconfirmed from Mt. Nothofagus and would also be in Donaldson SF, it is currently thought that this may be a new undescribed species. The Pouched Frog and Rufous scrub bird have also been recently recorded at Mt Nothofagus, and the Pouched Frog at Mt. Clunie so these should have been considered.

Other species likely to occur are Powerful Owl, and Stephens Banded Snake.

NEFA previously identified suitable habitat for Albert's Lyrebird in Koreelah SF (on the western side of Mt. Clunie) and because of the Forestry Corporations refusal to survey for them had to undertake our own surveys to confirm their presence, along with a healthy population of Giant Barred Frogs.

NEFA considers that the Forestry Corporation should implement the default prescriptions for Giant Barred Frog, Albert's Lyrebird, Marbled Frogmouth, and Golden-tipped Bat (ie expand filter strips along all streams by 10m throughout these compartments) or undertake adequate surveys for them.

The *Phyloria* sp likely to occur here is currently thought to be a new undescribed species and must be adequately surveyed for before logging along with the Rufous Scrub Bird.

Given the large numbers of oldgrowth trees, NEFA considers that Greater Glider densities are likely to be found to be greater than 1 per ha in many parts of the area and that hollow-bearing tree retention should be increased to 8 per hectare.

Stream Crossings

Crossings C and D were considered to be non-compliant.

At crossing C the "gully stuffer" was not considered to be stable, was rotten and apparently was not functioning. Evidence of significant erosion around the gully stuffer was evident , and recent works had bulldozed a large volume of soil into the creek to rebuild the crossing. It is assumed that in a heavy rainfall event that much of the soil pushed into the creek will wash downstream. This is a second order stream and the Roding Plan identifies the need for a bridge at this location.

At crossing C the fill bulldozed into the stream, along with the gully stuffer, should be removed immediately. Disciplinary action should be taken against those responsible for this environmental vandalism.



At crossing D there was an obvious creek bed that had simply been filled in to a depth of about half a metre at some previous time to construct a “causeway” with no apparent drain. It is inappropriate to leave this fill as a dam across the creek and simply gravel its surface as proposed.

At crossing D the earthen causeway needs to be removed and the natural form of the creek-bed re-established.



While not identified in the Harvesting Plan as having been prepared, it is considered that a Pre-Logging And Pre-Roading Aquatic Habitat Assessment should have been prepared in accordance with Condition 9 of the Fisheries Licence before Crossing C was reconstructed. With additional in-stream works required on a number of crossings and a snig track approved for crossing a first order stream an assessment needs to be done.

NEFA considers that a Pre-Logging And Pre-Roading Aquatic Habitat Assessment must be prepared in accordance with Condition 9 of the Fisheries Licence.