



Victorian National Parks Association

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Media inquiries: Matt Ruchel on 0418 357 813

www.vnpa.org.au

Call for better protection of special places in Central Victoria

A new report released today calls for a dramatic increase in government spending to manage Central Victoria's natural areas and greater protection of more than 100,000 hectares of state forest.

The report, *Better Protection for Special Places*, released by the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA), documents a new investigation into the natural values of 20 areas covering 108,000 ha of state forest across Central Victoria.

The VNPA, Victoria's leading conservation organisation, undertook the exhaustive investigation over the past two years.

"These 20 sites are real 'hidden gems' with many unique natural features," VNPA Executive Director Matt Ruchel said today. "They are home to threatened and rare species and deserve better management and protection within the National Parks Act.

"The additional protected areas would strengthen the environmental credentials for the Victorian Goldfields region bid for World Heritage listing announced by Premier John Brumby last week," Mr Ruchel said.

"There is an urgent need for increased investment in on-ground conservation management from the State Government. There are a huge number of issues with pest plants and animals, poor fire management, logging and a range of other threats."

According to the Victorian Government's *State of the Environment Report* (SOE 2008), Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia, with more than half of its native vegetation removed. This figure jumps to 80 per cent on private land. The SOE also noted that many vegetation types were still under-represented in the reserve system in Central Victoria.

Mr Ruchel said most of Victoria's intact native vegetation and habitat for wildlife is found on public land, and that more state forests need to be converted to state parks or other conservation reserves.

"Better protection and management of habitat on public land such as state forest, national parks and reserves is critical to the survival of threatened species and will provide the vital foundations needed to create environments that will stand up to the impacts of climate change," he said.

"The 20 sites identified for better protection and management across Central Victoria are the foundations for the future and need more resources and better protection so we can start to build wildlife links across the landscape."

The VNPA is calling for increased investment of \$20 million in start up and management costs for new parks and at least another \$1 million a year for on-ground management in existing reserves.

The size of the sites identified in the investigation ranged from a few hectares up to 31,000 hectares in the Wombat Forest, near Daylesford. A number of small conservation reserves were also assessed, with recommendations for better management.

The areas were assessed for vegetation significance, importance as a landscape link, and habitat for threatened species such as the Brush-tailed Phascogale (also called a Tuan), Powerful Owl, Grey-crowned Babbler, and rare and threatened plants.

For interview: Matt Ruchel, VNPA Executive Director, on 0418 357 813 or 03-9341-6504

Download the media briefing, summary and full report from www.smallparksproject.vnpa.org.au

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As Victoria's leading nature conservation organisation we seek to protect the natural environment through national parks, conservation, land reserves, and better protection and management across the landscape.

For more information visit www.vnpa.org.au