

The International Year of Forests – celebrating forests for people



BY JERRY VANCLAY

The International Year of Forests offers an opportunity for a considered dialogue within the community about the 'big picture' of forestry. Too often public debate deals with acute issues that are urgent and local, but neglects chronic issues that are less visible but more important, and forestry is no exception.

The national launch of the UN International Year of Forests was celebrated at Parliament House in Canberra late March. The United Nations declared this year to raise awareness of sustainable management, conservation and development of all types of forests throughout the world.

It is easy for people to feel strongly about smoke from a hazard-reduction burn and fail to recognise the ecological role of fire in the landscape; or to regret the harvesting of a tree while failing to acknowledge the regeneration that follows or the utility of the greenhouse-friendly wood produced. Or to become fixated about carbon sequestration and neglect other environmental services such as recreation and wildlife.

In some places, well-meaning legislation to protect native flora and fauna has created so many obstacles that

landholders deliberately discourage native wildlife – a lose-lose situation. One goal for the UN International Year of Forests is to foster community-wide discussion about a broad perspective of forestry and its place in modern society and to pave the way for win-win opportunities.

Some people hope the Year will lead to protection of more forest in national parks, and that's a good objective, but recognises only one aspect of the many challenges facing forests. In Australia, it is easy to imagine that logging is the major threat, and that national parks are the solution. In some other countries, it is obvious that poverty and land shortages mean that forests will remain only if they 'pay their way,' either through ecotourism, through harvesting of plant and animal products, or by providing environmental services. We may lament the loss of organisms that provide these products, but if they provide the income that maintains the forest, it may be for the greater good.

Many examples exist of where people have modified forests to become more productive, while retaining most of the qualities of a natural forest. For instance, the damar forests of Krui in southern Sumatra have been progressively modified for centuries to increase the yield of damar resin, which is traded internationally for incense and provides an important source of income to local people – but the forests remain natural-looking with many native plants and animals.

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FORESTRY PLANTATION INSURANCE

Plantation Cover [First Party]

- ▶ Fire resulting from explosion or otherwise
- ▶ Lightning
- ▶ Aircraft or other aerial devices and/or articles dropped there from
- ▶ Windstorm (including cyclone, prior submission to underwriter)
- ▶ Claims Preparation Costs - limit to be selected
- ▶ Loss Mitigation Expenses - limit to be selected
- ▶ Cost of Re-establishment - limit to be selected
- ▶ Removal of Debris - 10% of plantation value, but not exceeding \$250,000 any one plantation

Legal Liabilities:

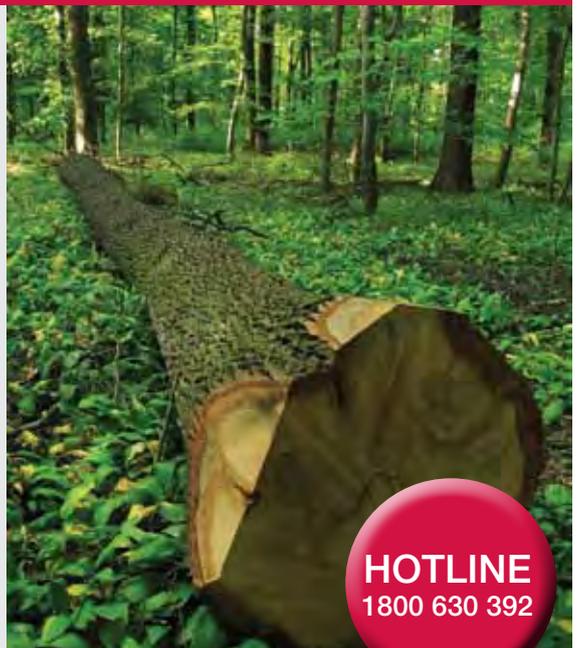
- ▶ Third Party Risks
- ▶ Namely Common Law



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More than 7,000 people attended the Festival of the Forests ACT held at the new 250ha National Arboretum Canberra in March 2011. A participant in the International Year of Forests, the festival included 12 guided walks through various feature forests selected from the 75 forests planted to date. Adrian Brown (pictured) a Ranger from Namadgi National Park, led a group explaining about the history of the land and how tracking is done. PHOTO: Linda Muldoon

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An Australian analogue is thinning to remove less productive trees, a modification that may not only make a forest more productive, but may also make it look more aesthetic and may benefit wildlife by hastening the development of large trees and large hollows. The challenge is to ensure that the harvest remains sustainable and that the modifications don't compromise the essential qualities of the forest.

Challenge to sustain firewood

Worldwide, one of the great challenges is to sustain firewood, which is in great demand, not for heating, but for cooking food and boiling contaminated water to make them safe for human consumption.

The insatiable demand for firewood is a major threat to some forests, and signals the need for tree plantings to offer an alternative, not to limit firewood harvesting when no alternative exists. It is easy to understand that people need firewood within walking distance, and that prohibition will either divert and increase the pressure elsewhere, or be ineffective if there is no alternative. It is less obvious that this effect applies to many aspects of forest harvesting. If we choose to protect Australia's native forests, but still seek durable hardwood for our 'timber deck' lifestyle, then we're simply diverting our footprint to forests abroad, often to countries less able to enforce wise forest management.

The knock-on effect that occurs when we choose to protect a forest is greater than many of us imagine. It's easy to comprehend the knock-on when we import Asian meranti, rather than use our own red gum, but many knock-on effects are subtle. Wood is the most greenhouse-friendly of all our building products, because it stores carbon, requires little energy to process, and creates space for new trees to grow. If we choose a non-wood alternative such as steel or concrete, we're contributing to the greenhouse effect, which may in due course be a major threat to some of our forests – and climate change is but one of many subtle threats to our forests.

At the time of white settlement, there were large areas of forest uninterrupted by roads and powerlines, and fires and floods merely created a patchwork patina providing many refuges for wildlife.



The national launch of the UN International Year of Forests was held in Parliament House, Canberra, on 23 March.



Linda Sewell, the Chair of the Transitional Board for AFPA and current Chair of A3P with NAFI President Greg McCormack. At the dinner at Parliament House, an announcement was made that the Australian Plantations, Pulp and Paper Industry Council (A3P) and National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI) were merging to form a new body, the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA).



Students from 11 schools exploring Neville State Forest at the Kids Teaching Kids Conference in March, sponsored by Lachlan Catchment Management Authority in central western NSW. Neville Public School year 6 students MC'ed the day and students from all participating schools ran sessions under the theme of 'Our Forests, Creeks and Wetlands,' ranging from a forest animals' puppet show, to a scary tale on salinity, to a field trip to Neville forest. Schools were mentored in the creation of their presentations by a variety of people ranging from scientists to Landcare volunteers.

Today, most of our forests, in national parks or elsewhere, are fragmented by urban and agricultural landscapes, and criss-crossed by roads and transmission lines. A fire or storm may demolish an entire patch of forest, leaving few refuges for those creatures unable to escape across our anthropogenic landscape. The subtle effects of fragmentation and linear barriers such as roads, of weeds and feral animals, and of diseases and disasters, combine to conspire against our best efforts of preservation.

Many forest lovers recognise that the best defence against these threats is active management to maintain both an income stream and field staff with local knowledge. One such approach is the UNESCO Biosphere concept that regulates land use in a nested series of zones, with strict preservation at the core, low-impact uses such as selective timber harvesting in buffer areas, and more intensive uses such as plantations in the outer transition zone. This approach is more nuanced than the usual alternative of 'produce or protect,' so common in our debates in Australia; and it's ill-suited to blanket state-wide codification.

Instead, an active approach, balancing conservation and production, demands informed, considerate management by skilled and experienced field staff. One of the great challenges for us in this International Year of Forests is to foster those skills and opportunities through both education and governance.

Jerry Vanclay is Professor of Sustainable Forestry and Head of the School of Environmental Science and Management at Southern Cross University.

He is Chairperson of the National Steering Committee for the International Year of Forests, which includes representation from

AFG. Jerry was recently awarded the prestigious Scientific Achievement Award, from the International Union of Forest Research Organisations (IUFRO), for his distinguished scientific achievements in the field of forestry research. The award, which is given to only 10 forest scientists once every five years, is to be presented to Professor Vanclay at the 23rd annual IUFRO World Congress in Seoul, Republic of Korea, in August 2011.



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