Fire Operations Manager at Orbost DSE, was not concerned about the possible burning of the unmapped rainforest, “Look, everybody has a different view about what rainforest is, but if its genuinely rainforest it will not be burnt anyway, because of the fuel moisture differential and the time of year we burn”. According to the DSE is under immense community pressure to reduce the risk of wildfire through fuel reduction burning, and that must take precedent over ecological considerations. “Although there is probably room for more fire ecology planning, it is incumbent on the DSE to take action because the consequences of doing nothing may be worse”.

After the Gippsland Environment Group alerted the Orbost DSE to the existence of the rainforest stand within the planned burn boundaries, the manager of Biodiversity at Orbost DSE, removed the area from the burn schedule pending more research.

Sources and Bibliography.


Tolhurst, Dr K, and N. P. Cheney, *Synopsis of the Knowledge Used in Prescribed Burning in Victoria*, Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Melbourne, 1999, p. 82.


**Transcripts of Interviews**

Transcript: [ ] DSE Fire Manager. Orbost.

Date of interview: 14 April 2010

0:32. PV. Did the Dinner Cr fire go as it was supposed to go?

: Look I’m not sure that all the monitoring has been done out there. We were after a sort of patchy sort of result out there, but I understand that it may have burnt more than we were actually targeting. But that will happen from time to time.

1:10. PV. At the upper end of one of the tributaries of Dinner creek there was a wetland area, like a swamp, with sphagnum moss and garnia, that has been burnt. And there was another in the area, a smaller depression type, that has also been burnt.

1:20. : They do often burn really well those heath lands, they are often some of the most volatile pieces of country.

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16:43. PV. On Wombat Track there is a burn marked down for next year that is not coming up on the EVC as rainforest, what happens on the day of the burn in that sort of case.

17:23. : Well the rainforest is not targeted. The principle is across the landscape you have these different EVCs that are more or less flammable, and if you are talking about RF well one of our objectives of managing a burn is to exclude the RF from fire. And one
of the positives of conducting a fire on the dryer aspects is that it will provide protection in a bushfire event to the generally damper EVCs, but during the summer they might be susceptible to being burnt.

18:46. PV. So you would prefer to lite the fire using the road as border.

. Look everybody has a different view about what RF is, but if it is genuinely rainforest it will not be burnt anyway, because of the fuel moisture differential and the time of year we burn.

19:37. . Talk to at Nowa Nowa.

23:24. PV. Was there actually a Fire Ecology Strategy written somewhere, or created, or is it somehow incorporated into other plans?

23:30. . The Fire Ecology Strategy is quiet broadly written and at a state level, so the fire ecology strategy is what I described to you before about trying to reach idealised age class distribution and when you asked has that analysis been done I said yes, and that’s the fire ecology strategy in a broad sense. There’s probably room for quite specific stuff but that’s probably down the track a little bit, that’s what everybodies desire is, quite specific fire ecology monitoring as you have been talking about… planning around it to be able to reach the best possible outcome for a diversity point of view.

24:25. PV. There would need to be a lot of research on the ground to reach that point wouldn’t their?

24:29. . Yeah, you can always do more research you’re right. Although there is probably room for more fire ecology planning, it is incumbent on the DSE to take action because the consequences of doing nothing may be worse.

24:55. PV. So the fires are to protect biodiversity as well?

24:58. . Oh absolutely, absolutely, that’s the whole basis of it, most of our burning, a lot of our burning is to achieve biodiversity outcomes.

Interview: . Manager, Biodiversity, DSE, East Gippsland.

Date of interview: 14 April 2010.

07:36. PV. What kind of precaution is applied to the planning process given that the Green and Golden Bell Frog were found in the area before the fire, and the hollow bearing trees?

08:02. . Well unfortunately there isn’t much we can do now about the hollow bearing trees catching fire in a broad scale fire, you can do something about them in a little fire by
raking around them, but really in a larger scale burn which we are probably doing more and more of, there’s not really much you can do over thousands of hectares. And we would expect that there will be a net loss of hollow bearing trees. There have been some areas where burns have been proposed and they are not going ahead, for the reason they are old-growth, they are of a kind that it will be difficult to burn them in such a way that the hollows would not be significantly diminished.

09:30. PV. How do you exclude fire from environmentally sensitive areas such as riparian vegetation?

09:48. If there are some areas that contain specific environmental attributes that we want to protect, we could exclude them from fire with a bulldozer line. However that is expensive and often very destructive, on most of these large burns, the main management technique used is the way in which the lighting pattern of the fire is done, sometimes that is not as effective as we would hope.

10:34. PV. The fire at Dinner Creek seemed to act a little like a logging coupe burn, the way they lit it on all surrounding sides simultaneously then a helicopter lit the centre, do you find that you get the inward rush of oxygen like what fuels a regeneration coupe burn?

10:57. The fuel generally isn’t as heavy or evenly distributed in that kind of fire as you get in a slash burn, it will be patchy in a burn like this, but this one certainly went pretty hard.

**Interview: Dr Rohan Bilney. Gippsland Environment Group**

Date of interview: 14 April 2010.

**0:15 RB.** The DSE justify conducting fuel reduction burns because they say that fire is a natural process. It is a bad methodology, they maintain that that is the most important ecological aspect. Fire is natural that is obvious, through lightening strike etc, but lets get down to the fact that burning on that scale is completely different. Even the seasonality of these fires is fairly different. In natural fires the predominate cause would be lightening strike, that would usually occur in late spring early summer, and the here, they are trying to do burns in late autumn winter, when historically the only fires that would have occurred then would have been aboriginal but we don’t really know anything about the freaquency and why they burnt when and why. There is an interesting study from SE NSW, studying the effect of logging and fire on biodiversity, they found that biodiversity was not returning compared to wildfire because they are not hot enough to get the seeds…

**4:00. RB.** Trying to prevent wildfires through fuel reduction burning is a threatening process (to biodiversity) because wildfires are an important process, that actually causes an increase in biodiversity. (Fuel reduction burning does not get hot enough in a lot of
cases to cause seed germination). One of the fallacies is that fire is a natural process, and species have adapted to fire and therefore it does not matter what sort of fire occurs in the ecosystem species shold be fine. That’s the sort of mentality that management practives are based on. It also doesn’t reduce fuel, it reduces some fuel but most important fuel to reduce risk is what is called elevated fuels, a lot of the bark fuels. So having cool carpet burns, all that really does is reduces the mid story or the understory, but in no way does it actually impact on the bark fuels. To reduce fuel you have to have hot burns. Carpet burns only reduce fuel loads for 3-5 years and that is the window when some benefit may be gained., They are randomly selecting areas to burn, They haven’t really got an adequate ecological basis for what they are doing.

11:39.RB. EVC was done in an adhoc process. Based on geology aspect, you can’t necessarily go by EVC, especially for overlap areas, that is usually quiet a significant ecotone generally. There is also a particular scale, 1ha or something. Generally most of the owl finding s in EG are the result of Owl playback surveys in the mid 1990s. Mostly done on the basis of random surveys.

16:00. RB. The owl records have not necessarily been updated into the Wildlife atlas yet, and I’ve had a few examples where my finding areas have been logged or burnt because the information has not got through to the right people. The Atlas is 3 or 4 years behind the actual records. (LIKE THE FFGA)

19:14 Southern Brown bandicoot.

34:03. PV. The Department has now almost completed burning all the coastline between the Snowy mouth and Lake Tyres, what do you think will be the ecological consequences of that ?

34:27. RB. I think it’s utter madness to burn such large patches of forest within such a close time scale, where are the species going to come from for re-colonisation, its in the Code of Practice not to do contiguous burning.

35:00. PV. What in the Burning Code of Practice? I went right through that and didn’t see that.

35:09. RB. Yes, well, I haven’t been through the latest edition, but I had a lot to do with preparing submissions for the earlier edition and it was in that. It is not just that they have burnt from Wombat Creek to the Snowy, they have also a lot of burning further East as well, towards Cann River and cape Conran. It doesn’t make sense to burn so much of your coast line when there are bugger assets down there.

36:01.PV. What is the situation with the Masked Owl in these areas that are being burnt?

36:15. RB. The coastal forests of East Gippsland are the strong hold of the Masked Owl, a species listed as threatened, under two laws, the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act and the Federal, Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. Most of East Gippsland’s Masked Owls live in the coastal forests now being subjected to
intense broad area fuel reduction burns by the DSE. If the DSE continues with its program to burn large areas of coastal forest without adequate ecological planning, monitoring and research, they will wipe out much of the crucial habitat for these large forest owls.

0:15 RB. The DSE justify conducting fuel reduction burns because they say that fire is a natural process. It is a bad methodology, they maintain that that is the most important ecological aspect. Fire is natural that is obvious, through lightening strike etc, but lets get down to the fact that burning on that scale is completely different. Even the seasonality of these fires is fairly different. In natural fires the predominate cause would be lightening strike, that would usually occur in late spring early summer, and the here, they are trying to do burns in late autumn winter, when historically the only fires that would have occurred then would have been aboriginal but we don`t really know anything about the frequency and why they burnt when and why. There is an interesting study from SE NSW, studying the effect of logging and fire on biodiversity, they found that biodiversity was not returning compared to wildfire because they are not hot enough to get the seeds…