

Central Highlands June Storm Event

Community update – October 2021

Key updates

- Following the June storm event, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Parks Victoria (PV) crews have been making steady progress in forest and park areas, undertaking assessments and clearing fallen timber from roads and tracks.
- From 1 September, parts of the Wombat State Forest were opened to the public, including a number of recreation sites and firewood collection areas.
- However, the Public Safety Zone will remain in place across some parts of the Wombat State Forest over the next few months. These areas will remain closed as there are ongoing public safety concerns due to the risk of falling trees and the use of heavy plant and machinery in the area.
- Work has commenced to clear fallen and hazardous trees at Trentham Falls. The site will be reopened as soon as possible when declared safe for visitors to return.
- Key visitor sites, including several walking tracks along Cameron Drive, are now open in the Macedon Regional Park.
- It's important that members of the public adhere to any closures that are in place, both for their own safety and to allow crews to operate safely and effectively.
- We would like to thank the community for their patience while we carry out these important works.



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Recreation sites/ hiking trails

Following the June storm event, there were 31 recreation sites across the Wombat State Forest, Hepburn Regional Park, Macedon Regional Park and Trentham Falls that were significantly impacted and damaged.

In addition to this, over 150km of walking and hiking trails were also impacted.

Some of the damage to recreation sites and hiking trails include - large amounts of hazardous trees, damage to fences, erosion of roads and destruction of campground assets such as toilets, picnic tables, fireplaces and BBQ pits.

Hazardous trees remain a priority in these recreation sites and will require specialist assessment prior to reopening to the public. Some sections of hiking trails will also require repairs where the rootballs from very large fallen trees have destroyed the trail surface.

Our crews have been working hard to assess and clear these sites so we can open them back up to the public as quickly as possible. We know that many people enjoy visiting these beautiful sites and understand the inconvenience caused by their closure.

The below recreation sites have now been opened to the public:

- Carrols Campground
- Balt Camp
- Werribee River Picnic Area
- Sailors Falls and Twin Bridges Visitor Areas (Hepburn Regional Park)
- Scout Camp area (Macedon Regional Park)
- Harbison's and McGregor's picnic grounds and Camels Hump visitor site along Cameron Drive (Macedon Regional Park)
- Lerderderg campground (Lerderderg State Park)
- Shaws Lake, McKenzie Flat and O'Briens crossing picnic grounds (Lerderderg State Park)

Crews are currently working on opening the following sites to the public in the coming months:

- Jack Cann Reserve
- The Three Lost Children Walk
- Trentham Falls visitor site and viewing lookouts
- Days and Sanatorium Picnic Grounds (Macedon Regional Park)
- Amblers Lane Campground and East Walk (Lerderderg State Park)

Rest assured, we will continue to update the community as our work progresses and further areas in the forest and parks are able to be opened up to the public.

Roads and tracks – vehicle access

Crews are still working to assess the entire road network impacted by the June storm event, however we have now assessed all of the strategic fire access roads. About 70% of these roads have now been cleared and treated. Crews continue to focus on clearing and treating the remainder of our strategic road network, while preparations are underway to commence clearing and treating the boundary track network.

On the Parks Victoria estate, approximately 90% of storm impacted roads have been cleared for access and hazardous trees have been treated.

Due to seasonal road closures and inclement weather, crews have not been able to assess and clear some areas within the forest.

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However, we want to reassure the community that crews are working hard to have the large majority of publicly accessed roads open by the end of the year. Some temporary road closures may occur while timber harvesting and recovery works are undertaken.

Emergency preparedness and fuel management progress

We know that many people in the community are concerned about the upcoming summer fire season due to the tree fall and increased fuel load as a result of the June storm event.

Crews are currently busy planning for the upcoming season and are working hard to ensure that fire access tracks are re-opened as quickly as possible. This will help us to respond to any bushfires that may occur, as well as allowing us to continue delivering our year-round planned burning program.

We have 87 planned burns scheduled to take place across the Midlands District over the next three years if conditions permit, including fuel reduction, ecological and Traditional Owner burns. Our planned burning program is an important piece of work that helps to reduce bushfire risk for communities and the environment.

Across the 2021/22 planned burning program we have 16 burns planned within the Wombat State Forest area. Four of these have been postponed due to storm damage with others currently being assessed. However, additional replacement burns have been brought forward to ensure bushfire risk is appropriately managed in these storm affected areas.

In addition to planned burning, we also use a number of other operational tools to help reduce the fuel load and manage fire risk, including slashing and mulching, alongside creating and maintaining fuel breaks.

Community firewood collection has also been a consideration during the planning of these burns due to the increased volume of fallen timber and hazardous tree removal required within burn areas.



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Firewood collection from state forests

The spring firewood collection season commenced on the 1 September and communities are now able to gather wood for their personal use from designated firewood collection areas in state forests.

In the Wombat area there are six collection sites available:

- Firth Road, Trentham
- Leonards Hill – South Bullarto Hill, Daylesford
- Mill Road, Daylesford
- Old Blackwood Road, Daylesford
- Finger Post Road, Macedon
- Barkstead

The spring firewood collection season will finish on the 30 November.

To find out more about your local collection areas please visit: <https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/firewood/firewood-collection-in-your-region>

This season there will be more timber available due to the June storm event however it is still important that people do the right thing and stick to the collection limits of two cubic metres per person per day and a maximum of 16 cubic metres per household per financial year. Authorised officers will be patrolling parks, forests and reserves to catch those who aren't. If you see any illegal activity, please report this on 136 186.

We also ask everyone to please be mindful of their safety in the forest. Please be COVID safe and aware of the environment around you at all times, trees may fall or drop limbs without warning.

If you are collecting firewood, please ensure that you are appropriately trained and equipped to use any equipment such as chainsaws.

Please ensure you follow the latest directions issued by the Chief Health Officer. For further information, please visit <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>

Clean-up assistance on private property

A free Storm and Flood Clean-Up program has been announced by the government which includes the demolition and removal of any structures on eligible private property that were destroyed or damaged beyond repair by the June 2021 storms and floods.

This could include:

- residential homes and sheds
- commercial and public buildings
- other outbuildings.

The program will also remove hazards such as dangerous materials or trees, that pose a threat to property or work crews, as well as any vehicles that were damaged beyond repair.

This program is voluntary, free of charge and open to eligible property owners.

Work crews will also carry out works to make sure sites are safe after the removal of hazards. This could include building retaining walls, installing drainage or sewage systems and ensuring safe and clear access to a property.

The program is also accepting registrations for the assessment of dangerous trees on private property which pose a risk to a place of residence.

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For further information and to check your eligibility, please visit <https://www.vic.gov.au/storm-clean-up-program>

More information:

Park and forest closures:

- For a full list of park and forest closures please visit: www.ffm.vic.gov.au/visiting-state-forests/forest-and-road-closures
- If you would like to find out more about parks and reserves, including updates to the latest park closure information: <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/get-into-nature/safety-in-nature>

Local council websites:

- For Moorabool Shire Council assistance and support visit: <https://www.moorabool.vic.gov.au/Emergencies/Storm-emergency/Assistance-and-support-following-the-storm>
- For Hepburn Shire Council assistance and support visit: <https://www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/storm-update/>
- For Macedon Ranges Shire Council assistance and support visit: <https://www.mrsc.vic.gov.au/About-Council/News/News/Storm-Recovery>