

# Central Highlands June Storm Event

Community update – September 2021

## Initial response

Following the severe weather and storm event on the 10 June, the Wombat State Forest, the northern part of Lerderderg State Park and parts of Macedon Regional Park, Hepburn Regional Park and Trentham Falls (Coliban River Scenic Reserve) were closed to the public.

The damage caused by the June storms was extensive and we understand that local communities continue to feel the impacts of these events.

Clean up work began immediately following the storm event and FFMVic crews, including staff from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Parks Victoria (PV), worked closely with SES, CFA and Victoria Police to address urgent safety and access issues for community members and public road managers, while restoring power and water supplies.

DELWP and PV continue to work closely with local councils and other emergency services to assess community recovery needs. As a priority, this has included opening critical roads for community and resident use.

## Update on forest and park closures

DELWP and PV crews have been making steady progress in forest and park areas, undertaking assessments and clearing fallen timber from roads and tracks. Both agencies have been working closely together to undertake works in an efficient and prioritised manner across impacted areas of forest and parks.

The forest and parks have been closed to protect the community from the continued risk of hazardous trees and other safety concerns such as the movement of heavy plant and machinery conducting clean-up works.

The Public Safety Zone has been reviewed and we have been able to modify and reduce its size in the Wombat State Forest. This means that we will be able to allow some access to visitors and firewood collectors from 1 September 2021.

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.

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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## 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 43% of these roads have been cleared and we expect this figure to continue to rapidly increase as crews use heavy machinery to remove hazardous trees.

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

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.



## 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.

From 1 September the following recreation sites will be open to the public:

- Carrols Campground

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- Balt Camp
- Werribee River Picnic Area
- Sailors Falls and Twin Bridges Visitor Areas (Hepburn Regional Park)
- Scout Camp area (Macedon Regional Park)

Following this, crews will then continue working to open the below recreation sites:

- Firth Park
- Three Lost Children's Walk
- Andersons Mill Walk
- St Erths/ Jack Cann Reserve
- Harbisons Picnic Ground and other visitor sites along Cameron Drive (Macedon Regional Park)
- Campgrounds and picnic grounds in 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.



## Firewood collection from state forests

As a result of the June storm event, the autumn firewood collection season was disrupted with a number of sites in the Wombat State Forest closed due to the risk of falling trees.

From Wednesday 1 September the spring firewood collection season will commence, and communities will be allowed to gather wood for their personal use from designated firewood collection areas in state forests.

In the Central Highlands area there will be six collection sites available:

- Firth Road, Trentham
- Leonards Hill – South Bullarto Hill, Daylesford
- Mill Road, Daylesford
- Old Blackwood Road, Daylesford

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- Finger Post Road, Macedon
- Barkstead

Find out more about your local collection areas here: <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>

## Firewood collection from state forests

The Hepburn Shire Council will be running a short trial to finalise the logistics of how to best distribute storm-related firewood to residents and rate payers. Once restrictions allow, they will carry out the trial and roll out the broader program to provide cut and split firewood to residents and ratepayers for free.

For further details, please visit: <https://www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/firewood/>

### **Moorabool Shire Council**

Moorabool Shire Council is currently investigating options to process storm vegetation debris into firewood for potential offering to the community.

Please contact the council for further information or updates.

### **Macedon Ranges Shire Council**

Last month, Macedon Ranges Shire Council opened up a registration process so that free firewood and timber could be provided to local residents and rate payers. Registrations are now closed for Round 1 to ensure processed supplies can meet demand and collection logistics are safely managed at the transfer stations.

For further information on when the next round of firewood will be made available, please visit: [www.mrsc.vic.gov.au/Storm-Recovery](http://www.mrsc.vic.gov.au/Storm-Recovery)

## 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.

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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.

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](http://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>