



Goongerah Environment Centre (GECO)

2016 Community Environment Prize

Goongerah Environment Centre Office (GECO) is a grass roots community group based in the small town of Goongerah in far East Gippsland, Victoria. GECO have been campaigning for protection of East Gippsland's forests since 1993.

Using a variety of strategies including education and raising public awareness, political lobbying, non-violent direct action, citizen science and forest monitoring, GECO take action to protect high conservation value forests from logging.

Through their forest surveys and citizen science camps, GECO have been successful in stopping illegal logging in several East Gippsland forests.

The state-owned logging agency VicForests regularly breaches environmental laws by logging threatened species habitat and protected forest types. Through their Citizen Science Program, GECO takes action in the face of inadequate government regulation, collecting data on threatened species and ecological values that are protected by Victorian law but threatened by logging, reporting the results to the Victorian government.

GECO have undertaken surveys for species such as the endangered Long-footed Potoroo, Greater Glider and large forest owls in areas scheduled for logging. The program has protected habitat by creating reserves and stopped several unlawful logging operations.

GECO's citizen science program was nominated as a finalist in the 2015 United Nations World Environment Day Awards.

Regular educational forest survey camps based in Goongerah are organized by GECO, with participants learning about forest ecology, logging threats and ecological survey skills.

Although DELWP are supposed to regulate VicForests logging operations, inadequate and irregular auditing of their operations means logging often occurs in breach of environmental laws. GECO audits logging areas for compliance to the law and searches for threatened species before logging occurs.

GECO campaigners are being prosecuted by the Victorian Government for exposing

rainforest logging, charged with entering a logging area to document and expose logging of protected rainforest.

In March operations at Cabbage Tree Creek were stopped after GECO reported logging of rainforest buffers and several rare and protected slender tree-ferns. The operation remains under investigation by Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

Earlier in 2016, 100 hectares of forest on the Errinundra plateau were saved for Greater Gliders after GECO surveys earlier in 2016 with DELWP declaring they will now formally protect the area.

While VicForests reported to the media that they protected habitat for nine threatened species in 2016 because of surveys they had conducted, it was in fact the incredible work of GECO and their surveys that halted the logging in these areas.

Ed Hill, GECO Forest Campaigner, is available for interview on 0414 199 645

<http://www.geco.org.au>

<https://planetfunder.org/projects/GECO>

<http://wild.com.au/news/citizen-scientists-protect-kuark-forest/>