THE DESTRUCTION OF TASMANIA'S ANCIENT 'REGROWTH' FORESTS

An investigation into the logging of high conservation value 'regrowth' forest in southern Tasmania.

Prepared by Still Wild Still Threatened

April 2010

This report has been compiled by Still Wild Still Threatened.

Still Wild Still Threatened is a grassroots community organisation campaigning for the immediate protection of Tasmania's old growth and high conservation value forests and the creation of an equitable and environmentally sustainable forestry industry in Tasmania. Still Wild Still Threatened is based in Southern Tasmania and focuses its campaign on threatened old growth and high conservation value forests located in the Derwent Region.

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Cover image: Logging coupe CO002B, Wylds Craig Area / January 2010
Photographed by Peter Marseveen

Abbreviations

FT - Forestry Tasmania
HCV - High conservation value
IUCN - International Union for the Conservation of Nature
NGO - Non governmental organisation
RFA - Regional Forest Agreement
TWWHA - Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area

Report prepared by Ula Majewski.
Special thanks to Miranda Gibson, Ed Hill and Nic Fitzgerald.
Many thanks to all the wonderful photographers and volunteer researchers involved in Still Wild Still Threatened's survey program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tasmania is globally renowned for its spectacular examples of ancient forested landscapes, high biological diversity, unique Indigenous and European cultural heritage and unique wild places.

However, many of Tasmania's publicly-owned high conservation value forests continue to be decimated by logging, roading and burning operations. The vast majority of the wood harvested from these areas is woodchipped and exported.

The formal protection of these internationally recognised ancient forests should be an immediate priority for the Tasmanian and Australian Governments, as these unique ecosystems play a critical role in conserving biodiversity, wilderness and threatened species habitat, maintaining healthy hydrological flows and storing vast quantities of carbon.

Still Wild Still Threatened has documented the outstanding ecological values as well as the ongoing destruction of southern Tasmania's publicly-owned high conservation value (HCV) forests since 2007. This report presents survey data from four logging coupes of extremely high conservation value in the Derwent area that are situated in forests that are classified as 'regrowth'.

This report also challenges the Tasmanian and Australian governments' utilisation of the term 'regrowth forest'. It highlights the fact that the world's tallest hardwood tree, the Arve Valley's 99.6 metre tall 'Centurion', is located in an area that was classified as 'regrowth' during the Tasmanian Regional Forest Agreement process.

Still Wild Still Threatened would like to promote the high conservation values of forests that have never been logged, but are classified as 'regrowth' by the Tasmanian and Australian governments, and is advocating for their immediate formal protection.

The report provides evidence that tracts of high conservation value 'regrowth' forest in southern Tasmania are being destroyed and will continue to be destroyed by logging and roading into the foreseeable future unless key decision-makers in the corporate and political sectors take immediate action to protect these globally renowned ecosystems.

WE005E / February 2010 / Miranda Gibson

SX013L / February 2010 / Elisa Urdis

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been compiled by Still Wild Still Threatened to document the ongoing destruction of southern Tasmania's publicly-owned high conservation value (HCV) forests through industrial logging and roading operations. The report forms part of an ongoing survey program that has been conducted in the threatened forests of the Derwent region by volunteer researchers since 2007. Still Wild Still Threatened aims to highlight the outstanding conservation values of forests that have never been logged, but are classified as 'regrowth' by the Tasmanian and Australian governments, and to provide evidence that these forests continue to be subjected to destructive forestry operations.

The Australian state of Tasmania is internationally recognised for its outstanding examples of native forested landscapes, biological diversity, unique Indigenous and European cultural heritage and extensive tracts of spectacular wilderness.[1] One of our planet's great temperate wilderness areas is located in the island's south-west, and is partially reserved within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA). Unfortunately, outstanding tracts of ancient forest located just outside the boundaries of the TWWHA are still being subjected to large-scale logging and roading operations. The protection of these forests – situated in areas such as the Upper Florentine, the Styx and the Weld Valleys, the Wylds Craig Area and the Wedge – is an immediate priority due to their crucial role in: conserving biodiversity, threatened species habitat, wilderness and World Heritage values; maintaining hydrological flows; and storing huge quantities of carbon.

This report puts forth the argument that, in addition to the substantial tracts of 'RFA old growth' forest situated in these areas, there are large areas of mature 'regrowth' forest in Tasmania that are of exceptionally high conservation value. The report outlines the ways in which these supposed 'regrowth' forests have been classified as such by the Tasmanian and Australian Governments. It argues for the recognition of these forests as being of high conservation value and, as such, deserving of immediate protection. The report also presents a case study, showing data from four 'regrowth' logging coupes that have been documented as part of Still Wild Still Threatened's ongoing survey program.

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TASMANIA'S HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE 'REGROWTH' FORESTS

Industrial logging, roading and burning operations continue to decimate Tasmania's publicly-owned high conservation value forests. The destruction of old growth forests – particularly tall wet eucalypt forests, which are highly desirable for the logging industry – is still occurring at a critical rate. However, there are also large areas of extremely high conservation value forest that are not classified as old growth forest, and which continue to be destroyed at an alarming pace. Still Wild Still Threatened believes that public perceptions of the conservation value of these supposed 'regrowth' forests have been clouded by the Tasmanian and Australian Governments and seeks to actively promote their outstanding ecological values and advocate for their immediate protection.

The Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process defined 'old growth forest' as "ecologically mature forest where the effects of disturbances are now negligible".[2] However, for over a decade, the transparency and scientific credibility of the Tasmanian RFA process has been criticised by scientists, experts and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), particularly in relation to definitional semantics and mapping inconsistencies that resulted in compromised reservation outcomes.[3] A number of Australia's most eminent scientists have argued that "the scientific processes in the Tasmanian RFA were overwhelmed by political compromises" and as a result, the Tasmanian RFA "is widely perceived in the scientific community to have failed to deliver the intended protection for environmental, wilderness and heritage values that state and federal governments committed to".[4]

The ways in which particular areas of forest have been classified as 'old growth' or 'regrowth' has generated a significant amount of discussion, much of which originates from the contentious manner in which old growth forest was classified and mapped during the Tasmanian RFA process. As a result of this controversial mapping, the Australian and Tasmanian Governments have failed to classify significant tracts of mature Tasmanian forest that contain old and extremely large trees, and which have never been subjected to logging, as 'old growth'. Consequently, the Tasmanian conservation movement has continued to promote a scientifically-based argument for the recognition and protection of these old growth forests that are not recognised as such by the Tasmanian and Australian Governments.

Many key decision-makers, media representatives and members of the community believe that the term 'regrowth forest' signifies a forest which has been logged in the past and grown back. Within a Tasmanian forest context, this perception is inaccurate, as many forests which have been classified as 'regrowth' include areas that have never been subject to anthropogenic disturbances such as logging, but which may have been disturbed by natural events such as bushfires.

Forestry Tasmania (FT), the Government Business Enterprise directly responsible for the logging and roading of publicly-owned old growth and HCV forests has acknowledged that there is a distinct difference between forested areas that have been previously logged and 'regrowth' areas which contain old growth forest. These are defined by FT as:

> "(Aged) Regrowth—Forest that has been logged and regenerated, generally since 1960, using deliberate site preparation and seeding techniques. The year of sowing is documented and the age of the trees may be determined. Also referred to as silvicultural regeneration.
>
> (Unaged) Regrowth—Forest regenerated after wildlife or other disturbances, and containing a majority of trees less than 110 years old, where there is no deliberate site preparation or seed sowing. Unaged regrowth forest may contain scattered individuals or stands of ecologically mature trees."[5]

The Centurion and Triarius trees, discovered in 2008, provide a superlative example of the failure of the Tasmanian and Australian Governments, along with the logging industry, to recognise the systemic inadequacy of the RFA old growth classification and to accord many of these supposed 'regrowth' forests the recognition they deserve. Centurion (a 99.6 metre tall *Eucalyptus regnans*) and Triarius (a 86.5 metre tall *E. regnans*) were found in an unprotected 'regrowth' area of the Arve Valley in southern Tasmania.[6] Still Wild Still Threatened would like to emphasise the ultimate absurdity of a situation in which the world's tallest hardwood tree can be classified as 'regrowth'.

Rather than relying upon the Tasmanian and Australian Government's often paradoxical definition of 'old growth' and 'regrowth' forest in Tasmania, Still Wild Still Threatened would like to promote the term 'high conservation value forest' as a useful alternative. Still Wild Still Threatened recognises a full range of forest conservation values and endorses the following attributes of HCV forests:

- provide whole of landscape, reserve design and ecosystem connectivity benefits,rare, threatened or endangered, or contain centres of endemism;
- old growth and mature / unaged regrowth;
- forested wilderness;
- Rainforest (including with emergent eucalypts);

CO002B / January 2010 / Peter Marseveen

- undisturbed / negligibly disturbed mature forests;
- are free of phytophthora infection;
- highly (biologically) productive;
- have been identified as core habitats for local endemic, rare, threatened and endangered species;
- have been identified as having world heritage or of national heritage value;
- are located in areas with steep climate gradients;
- or form part of domestic supply or wild river catchments.;
- refugia and/or of evolutionary significance;
- are significant carbon stores; and
- areas of high Indigenous or European cultural and social significance, including scenic values and sense of place values.

CASE STUDY:

'Regrowth' logging coupes in Tasmania's southern forests

Still Wild Still Threatened have been conducting extensive flora surveys in the Derwent forests since 2007.[7] The four logging coupes detailed in this report were identified through an analysis of Forestry Tasmania's *Three Year Wood Production Plans*[8] and maps depicting the Tasmanian environmental movement's identified high conservation value forested areas (see Appendix), which were cross referenced with mapping showing the locations of 'RFA old growth' forest. Maps showing the boundaries and specific locations of each logging coupe were accessed from Forestry Tasmania's website.

Each of the four logging coupes surveyed and presented in this report is managed by Forestry Tasmania and classified under the land tenure of State Forest. The vast majority (if not all) of the forest situated within each of these logging coupes is classified as 'regrowth' forest, and as such contains only small (if any) sections of 'RFA old growth' forest (see maps of study area). Each of the logging coupes in this case study are situated 2000 metres or less from the boundary of the TWWHA.

The data used in this case study has been collected by volunteer researchers since 2007. Researchers visited each logging coupe on numerous occasions to document ecological values and disturbances, and recorded their observations on standardised field sheets. Research tools include; 1:25 000 topographical maps, cameras (stills and video), a Global Positioning System (GPS), compasses, flora and fauna identification literature, coupe maps, measuring tapes and, when available from Forestry Tasmania, Forest Practices Plans (FPPs) of each logging coupe. The results from these surveys are presented in this case study.

This case study is intended to provide a 'snapshot' sample of high conservation value 'regrowth' forests in the Derwent area and, as such, does not present a comprehensive overview of all HCV 'regrowth' logging coupes in the area. However, it must be noted that tracts of high conservation value 'regrowth' forest currently under threat from industrial logging and roading operations occur right across the Derwent area, and in other parts of southern Tasmania, including numerous tracts of forest in the Huon district.

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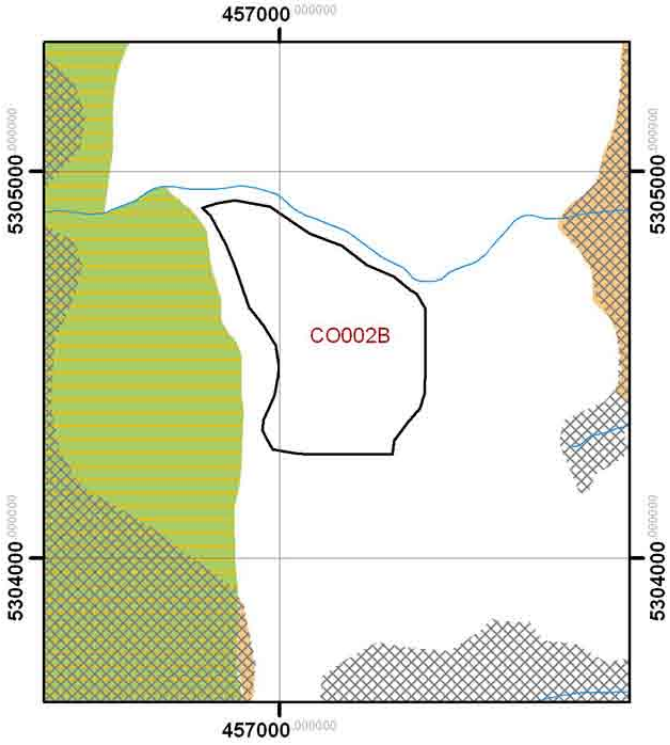
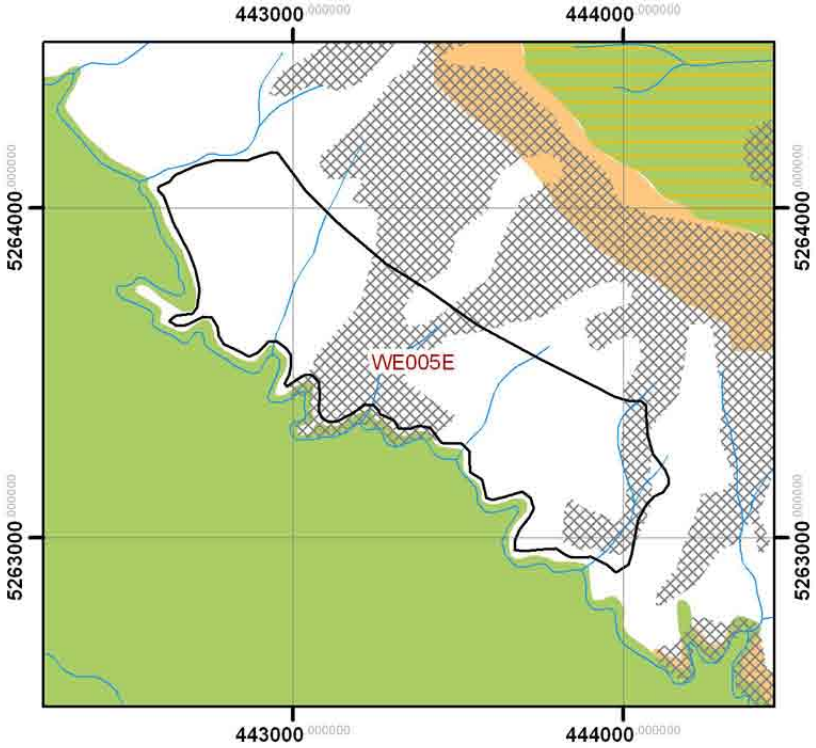
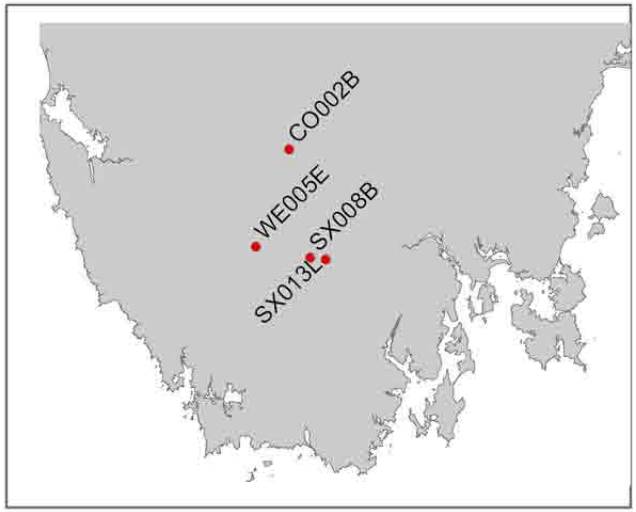
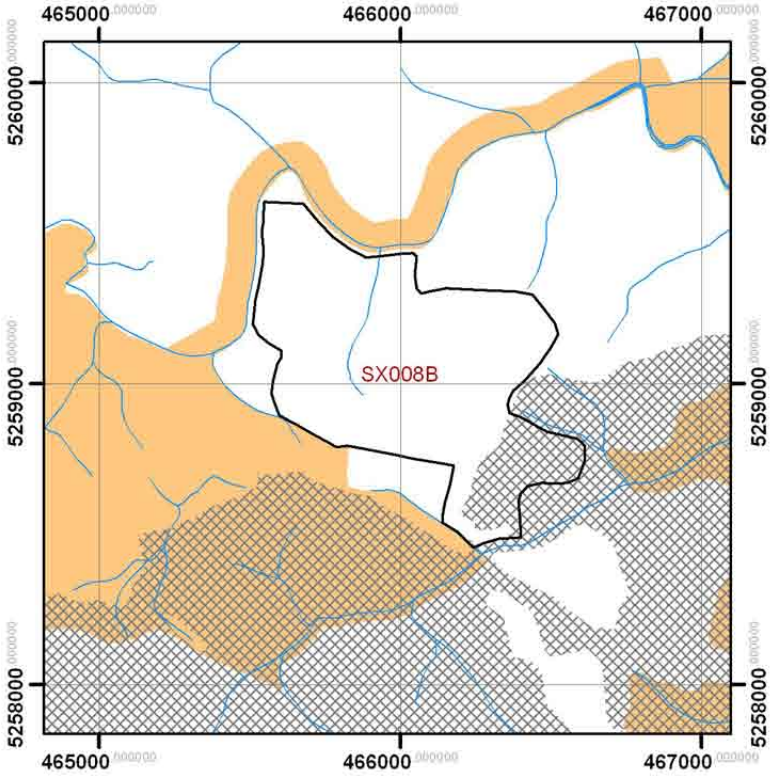


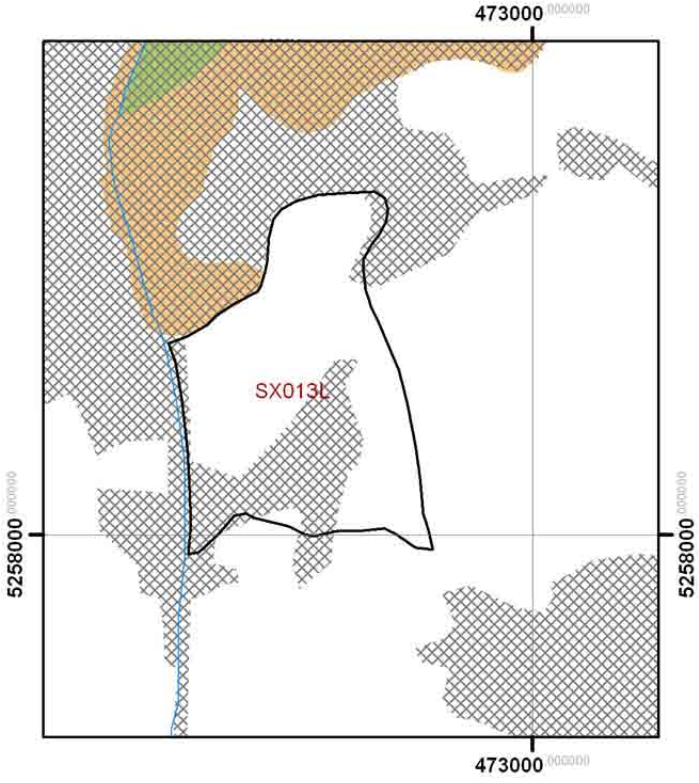


STUDY AREA:

Surveyed logging coupes in the Wylds Craig Area, the Wedge and the Styx Valley.







Approximate coupe boundary
RFA oldgrowth forest
World Heritage Area
Formal reserves
Informal reserves
N

Forestry coupes derived from Forestry Tasmania Three Year Wood Production Plan.

Maps produced by Nic Fitzgerald

Potential 'giant' *before* logging operations. CO002B / March 2009 / Peter Marseveen

Potential 'giant' *after* logging operations. CO002B / January 2010 / Peter Marseveen

The Wylds Craig Area

Logging coupe CO002B

Size: 23ha.

Distance from TWWHA: contiguous

CO002B WAS LOGGED IN 2009.

This site offers spectacular scenic views west across the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, which is located directly adjacent to the boundary of the logging coupe. This site contained significant stands of tall *Eucalyptus regnans*, including a number of possible 'giants,' one of which possessed a girth of 17.5 metres (pictured). Mature understorey species included outstanding examples of *Atherosperma moschatum* (sassafras), *Anodopetalum biglandulosum* (horizontal) and a limited distribution of Olearia argophylla (musk).

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The Styx Valley

Logging coupe SX008B

Size: 90ha.

Distance from TWWHA: 2000 metres

SX008B WAS LOGGED IN 2007 AND CABLE LOGGED IN 2008

Sections of this site provided an exceptional example of Gondwanian rainforest, dominated by sassafras, with an understorey comprised predominantly of ferns. Notable examples of mature *Eucalyptus johnstonii* (yellow gum) were prominent throughout the site. A number of mature *Eucalyptus delegatensis* and *E. regnans* were observed in sections of this site, along with mature rainforest species such as *Nothofagus cunninghamii* (myrtle). In 2007, 35 hectares of this ancient forest were cleared. In September 2008 an additional 55 hectares of this coupe were clearfelled using cable logging .

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The Styx Valley

Logging coupe SX013L

Size: 17ha.

Distance from TWWHA: 1000 metres

SX013L IS SCHEDULED FOR LOGGING IN 2010-2011

This site is an outstanding example of the mature mixed stand forests of the Styx Valley. Notable examples of tall *E. regnans* and *E. obliqua* have been observed throughout the proposed logging coupe. The understorey consists of mature rainforest species including sassafras, myrtle and *Dicksonia antarctica* (manferns). A number of juvenile ferns, along with a diversity of mosses, lichens and fungus, are present throughout the site.

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The Wedge

Logging coupe WE005E

Size: 53ha.

Distance from TWWHA: 700 metres

WE005E IS BEING LOGGED IN APRIL 2010

At the time of writing (March 2010), industrial logging operations were occurring at this site. In the logged area, evidence of the prior existence of tall mature eucalypts and mature rainforest species can be observed (log piles, felled trees, giant stumps, debris etc). In the sections of the coupe that have not yet been subjected to industrial logging operations at the time of surveying, notable stands of tall *E. obliqua* and *E. delegatensis* occur. Mature rainforest species, including sassafras, tree ferns and myrtles, were observed throughout the unlogged section of the site.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Still Wild Still Threatened strongly recommend that key decision makers in the political and corporate arenas take immediate action to ensure that:

- Tasmania's globally renowned high conservation value forests (see Appendix for map of identified HCV areas) be placed into formal reserves;
- The Australian and Tasmanian Governments expand the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area to protect adjacent forests with World Heritage values by incorporating them into the TWWHA and that this inclusion into the TWWHA be facilitated through the adoption of a new permanent boundary that accurately reflects the outstanding high conservation value of these forests;
- An immediate moratorium be placed on all forestry operations within identified HCV areas until such time as formal legislated protection is in place.

SX008B / April 2010 / Miranda Gibson

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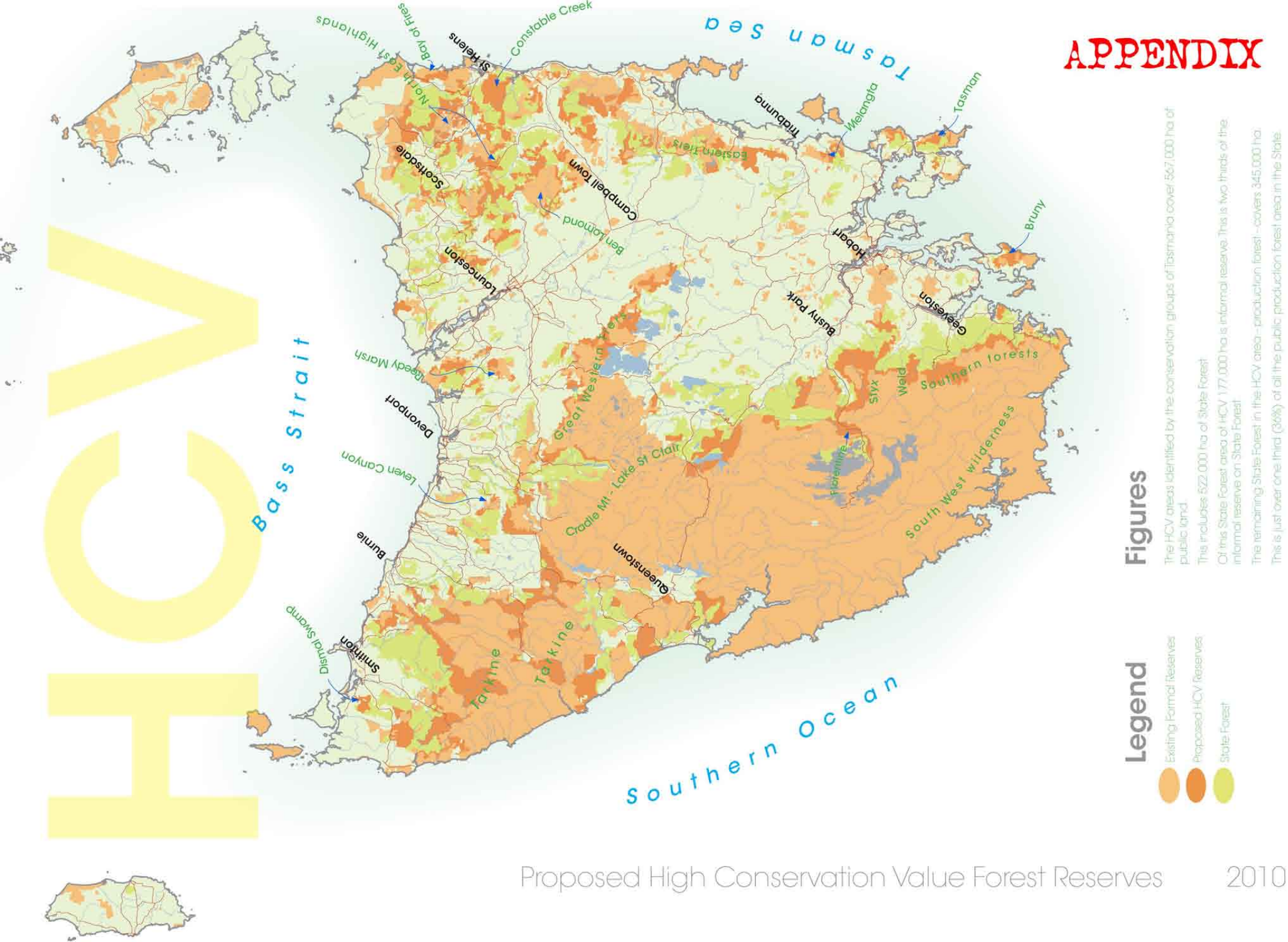
APPENDIX



Proposed High Conservation Value Forest Reserves 2010

High Conservation Forests In Tasmania

The maps indicating forests of high conservation value (HCV) are the product of many years work in Tasmania. They are the outcome of many different and often overlapping processes that have been carried out by governments, community groups, scientists and World Heritage authorities. These processes have occurred over the course of more than 25 years.

In defining high conservation value forests, we have considered one of the most widely accepted definitions (Forest Stewardship Council) and addressed the following criteria:

- Forests with high biodiversity values;
- Large intact natural forest areas;
- Rare or threatened ecosystems;
- Forests with critical ecosystem importance;
- Forest areas of importance to local communities;
- and indigenous peoples.

A summary of the processes that led to the identification of each major HCV area are shown on the table (right)

Any informal reserve is considered inadequately protected and is incorporated into the reserve ask for full, formal, legislated protection.

There is a process of ongoing refinement of boundaries in the following ways;

- Removing areas irretrievably degraded by logging and now isolated or fragmented;
- Some areas, whose values have been severely impacted by logging, but are located inside a contiguous area of HCV forest are retained and will be rehabilitated;
- Some areas, in the interest of establishing connected conservation reserves or delivering world heritage recommendations, are included;
- Where improved knowledge and information have identified previously unknown conservation values, areas will be added.

Areas of HCV Forest identified by Tasmania's Conservation Groups

HCV Area	Processes of HCV identification
Proposed extensions to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) (includes Styx and Great Western Tiers, as shown on PFGJ maps) This is one of the world's great temperate wilderness areas and includes sections of the Great Western Tiers, Upper Derwent, Navarre, Counsel, Florentine, Wedge, Tyenna, Styx, Weld, Snowy range, middle Huon, parts of Picton, Esperance and Lune catchments These are the areas that contain the most timber/pulp resource of all the HCV areas	National Estate listing (Government body: Australian Heritage Commission, 1980s) Helsham Commission of Inquiry 1987-88 and consultants International World Heritage experts, including IUCN, ICOMOS, World Heritage Centre and World Heritage Committee (includes official representatives of Government signatories to international treaty) Panel of Experts (Tas. Forests and Forest Industry Council – conservation groups, industry, scientists in 1990) Tasmanian Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage (Government, 1990) Sundry reports on threats to integrity of TWWHA (Australian Government 1993; Australian Government consultants, 1994 and 1995) Great Western Tiers National Parks proposals (community groups, 1990 and 1995) Sundry reports as part of Regional Forest Agreement process (inc Governments' Panel on World Heritage values, 1997) Tasmania Together process (Tasmanian Government) 2000 Promises by Australian Government, October 2004 Hitchcock report 2008
Tarkine (includes most of the HCV forests of north-west Tasmania)	Scientific consultants engaged by Tasmanian Conservation Trust (Forgotten Wilderness, 1992) National Estate listing (Government body: Australian Heritage Commission, 1990s) Tarkine National Coalition proposals 1995-2004 (representing the Wilderness Society, ACF and local groups) Calls for World Heritage investigation by IUCN (1990s) Tasmania Together process (Tasmanian Government) 2000 Sundry reports as part of Regional Forest Agreement process (inc Governments' Panel on World Heritage values, 1997)
Ben Lomond	National Estate listing (Government body: Australian Heritage Commission, 1980s) (part) Submissions to Regional Forest Agreement (TCT, 1996) Tasmania Together process (Tasmanian Government) 2000 Proposed Ben Lomond National Park (Wilderness Society, 2000)
North-East Highlands, including extensions to Blue Tier, Mt Victoria and Mt Arthur reserves and Panama Ridge	Submissions to Regional Forest Agreement (TCT, 1996) Proposal for a North-East Highlands National Park (community group 1998, revised 2008) Tasmania Together process (Tasmanian Government) 2000 Linking Landscapes Project (community groups and TWS 2007)
North-East Tasmania, including Mt Barrow, Mt Horror, Mt Cameron, Constable Creek – Lolla Tier, Fingal Tier, Evercreech, St Patricks River	Linking Landscapes Project (community groups and TWS 2007)
Eastern Tiers, Wielangta, Reedy Marsh, Tasman Peninsula, Bruny Island and other small areas	Scientists as part of Forests and Forest Industry Council, 1990 Community groups, 1990s Tasmania Together process (Tasmanian Government) 2000 Swift parrot breeding surveys and subsequent reports
Leven Canyon and Black Bluff	Community groups 1970s and 1980s Canyon and Bluff Working Group (The Canyon and the Bluff, 2003) and support from widespread community groups, 2003 Forestry Tasmania moratorium 2003

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