Fact sheet 12: Incorporating community values into forest management planning and Regional Forest Agreements

What does the Victorian public see as important when it comes to forests

Key points

- This project identifies what the public sees as important (their values) in terms of forests and forest management.

- Many studies, using a range of methods, have identified people's core values and the attributes of forests that people value.

- Communities value the natural, cultural and experiential attributes of forests. Recreation, learning, and economic production are also important.

- Values vary with people's roles, interests and affiliations, rather than where they live.

- Public acceptability of forest management is based on values. It is important to understand the community's values to ensure accountability and transparency.

- This project will synthesise research on community values relevant to the RFA regions, discuss the implications of these values for RFAs and future forest and fire management planning and recommend community engagement and other activities to address gaps.

Researching community values

This project will consolidate findings from existing research about the values of the Victorian public, to support the RFA assessments. The research will also underpin future community engagement and the results will support future forest and fire management planning within Victoria.

The term 'values', in the context of decision-making processes such as RFAs, generally means what is considered important to people, especially members of the public and decision-makers.

This project can add to existing understanding of the 'values' considered important in RFAs, including environmental values, the economic value of forested areas and forest industries, and social values (including community needs). There is an opportunity to incorporate values that are now better understood than previously, including the importance of experience and recreation in forests on our ability to realise community values in our planning processes.

Attributes of Victorian forests valued by the community include (broadly in descending order of importance):

1. Natural values – Forests are valued by the community as they support a diversity of living beings, human and non-human.

2. Experiential value – The value of forests for an individual's positive experiences and feelings.

3. Recreation value – A location or setting providing social or recreational activities such as hiking, mountain-biking, and camping.

4. Cultural value – A place of history and human memory or identity; or a source of inspiration.

5. Learning value – Providing an opportunity to expand scientific knowledge.

6. Productive value – Value for the forest's capacity to provide resources for human use, including renewable resources.

7. Social-economic – Value derived from forest-based economic activity.

Community values need to be reflected clearly in policy, RFA decisions, and throughout the decision-making process. This is to ensure public accountability and efficient spending of public funds that benefits the community. It also ensures that decisions about balancing multiple values are transparent, informed and supported by contemporary community values.

This project will consolidate findings from existing research about the values of the Victorian public, in order to support the RFA assessments. The research will also

Research project title

Incorporating values of the public data (community values) into Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) assessments

Who is doing this work?

University of Melbourne, School of Ecosystem and Forest Sciences

VICTORIA State Government | Environment, Land, Water and Planning

underpin future community engagement and the results will support future forest and fire management planning within Victoria.

Past research

There have been many studies over the past 15 years, using a range of methods to understand what people value about forests and landscapes. These have identified people's core values and the attributes of forests they value. They have also modelled the psychological processes behind public judgements of the acceptability of forest management, and measured public acceptability of forest policy scenarios.

For example, to identify and understand the range of community values in terms of management of Victorian forests, researchers initially conducted in-depth interviews with 36 people with diverse interests in forests. These values were further investigated through a large-scale survey of almost 1000 people throughout Victoria. This furt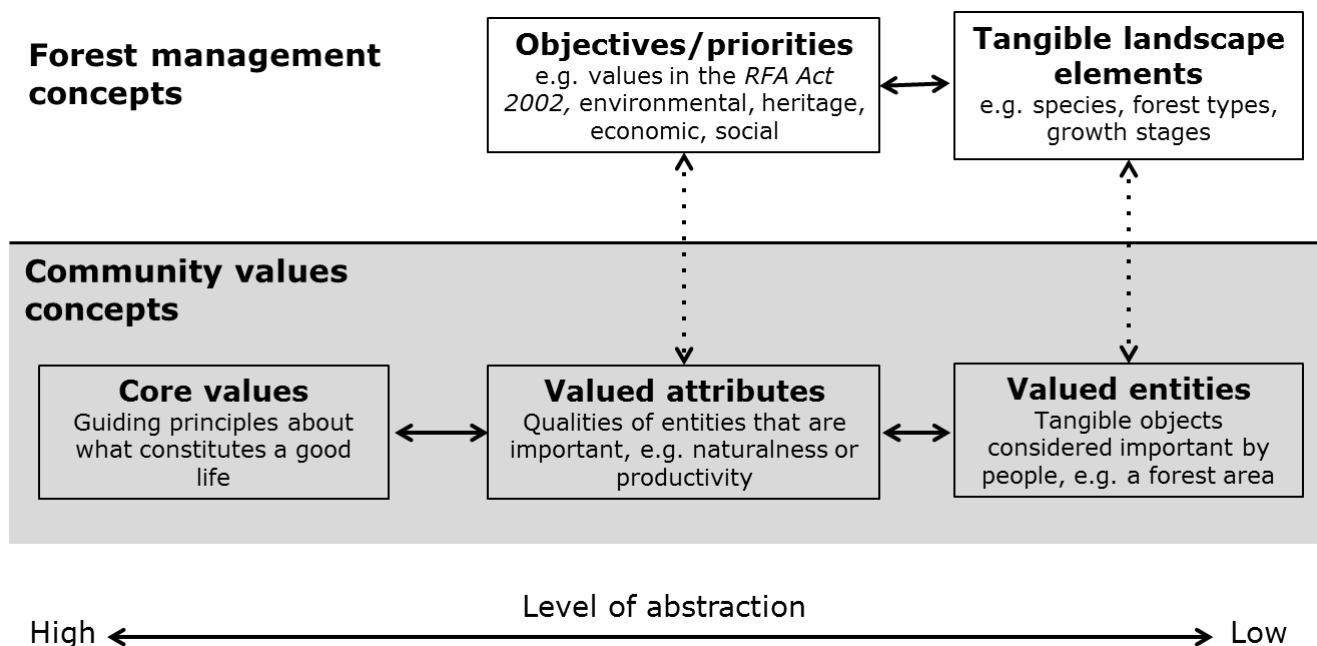her investigation measured the relative importance of the values identified in the interviews within a much larger sample of Victorians.

Results show that values vary with people's roles, interests and affiliations more than they vary with geography or between urban and rural communities.

This previous University of Melbourne research has studied many aspects of the Victorian public's' values in relation to forests. However, not all relevant information has been reported or organised for the specific purpose of supporting RFA decisions.

How will the research help manage our forests?

The research will compare valued attributes of the community with RFA management values. For this purpose, various concepts of community values are aligned with management concepts. For example, there are physical objects in the landscape (such as a forested area), and abstract attributes that are valued (such as nature).

Forest management concepts

| **Objectives/priorities** e.g. values in the *RFA Act 2002,* environmental, heritage, economic, social | ←→ | **Tangible landscape elements** e.g. species, forest types, growth stages |

Community values concepts

| **Core values** Guiding principles about what constitutes a good life | ←→ | **Valued attributes** Qualities of entities that are important, e.g. naturalness or productivity | ←→ | **Valued entities** Tangible objects considered important by people, e.g. a forest area |

Level of abstraction

High ←——————————————————————→ Low

Aligned concepts of values in forest management and the community

Public acceptability of forest management is based on values. However, knowing what people value doesn't entirely allow us to predict how people feel about various levels of management. It is also influenced by other factors including people's beliefs about the impacts of management, their trust in managers, and their view on whether the decision-making process is fair. Most important was people's beliefs on whether management was good for the environment and if it was good for industry, underpinned by trust in the management agency.

This project will synthesise data from previous relevant research, so that it can be incorporated into decision-

making and community engagement. The research will contribute to policy by enabling DELWP staff to make the best use of existing social values research.
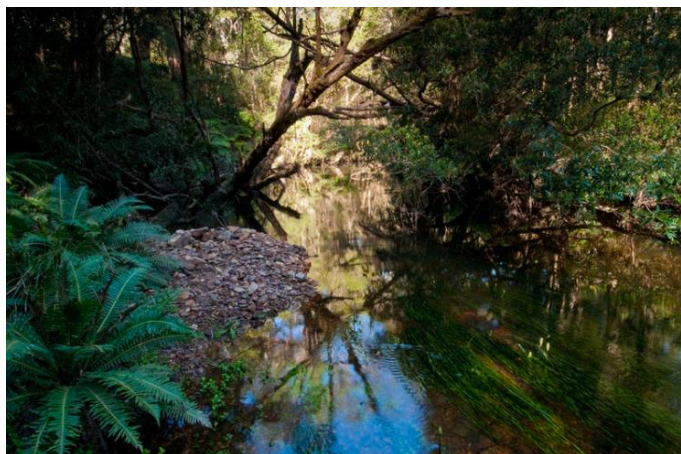

Attributes of Victorian forests valued by the community include natural values.

Image: DELWP Image library

More information

Future of our Forests
https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests

This series of fact sheets
https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests/forest-values-assessment/forest-values-assessment-fact-sheets

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