



# VIC EVENT

## RECREATION: WHAT'S IT REALLY WORTH?

17 JULY 2025

Richard outlined the history of recreation management in Victorian public land, focusing particularly on State Forests reflecting on his work in the space over the past 35 years.

He noted the emphasis on Management Plans in the 1980s and 1990s which virtually ceased after 2011, from which time planning became more thematic, rather than area-based and underpinned by a multiple-use philosophy. This was most noticeable in the predominance of fire management and a decline in holistic forest management.

The opportunity for positive messaging from a well-articulated recreation program was lost, and State Forests started to disappear from the public consciousness, with most people associating recreation with National Parks only.

At the same time the types of recreation activity were diversifying and increasing. For example, 4WD travel, mountain-biking, geocaching, dog-walking and hunting have all become more popular and more structured.



Mike Ryan and Tom Fairman



Sara Gipton and Blair Freeman



Peter Devonshire and Richard Wadsworth



Warwick Williams and Braden Jenkin

There has also been a democratisation of the information space on social media, with forest users mapping their own trails, and making their own recommendations about 'things to do'.

The Department has now commenced detailed forest use surveys that are generating fine-grained, validated information on State Forest usage, and it is hoped that this data will help to build the case for increased funding to support public engagement with State Forests.

Headlines from the the first survey of State Forest use in 2020 are:

- 16 Million visits per annum with an estimated economic contribution of \$1.8 Billion and generating 15,000 jobs (FTE)
- 37 % of Victorians had visited a State Forest

In Victoria there is an increasing focus on recreation, forest health and forest resilience and this is an opportunity to re-cast State Forest administration to return to holistic and strategic forest planning.