



Guidance Note: Reporting detections of Greater Gliders

Purpose

This Guidance Note provides advice to the community about how to record Greater Glider sightings and report them to the Conservation Regulator. Reports that comply with minimum standards can be used to inform the application of timber harvesting protections (also called 'prescriptions'). It also provides clarity on how Greater Glider protections are applied across the state based on these sightings.

Greater Gliders (*Petauroides volans*)

The Greater Glider (*Petauroides volans*), the largest of Australia's gliding possums, is an iconic species that lives in a variety of Eucalypt-dominated forests in Eastern Australia. Populations have undergone significant decline in recent decades, and consequently this species is listed as 'threatened' under Victoria's *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and 'vulnerable' under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The precise reasons for the species' rapid decline are unknown and appear to vary between regions. Contributing factors may include habitat loss and fragmentation, bushfire, planned burning, timber harvesting, hyper-predation by owls, extreme heat events, unquantified climate change impacts and drought.

What protections exist for Greater Gliders?

Two key protections currently apply to Greater Gliders in relation to timber harvesting in Victoria.

Code of Practice protection (East Gippsland FMA):

Under the *Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014* (the Code), there is a detection-based prescription for the protection of Greater Gliders. This applies within the East Gippsland Forest Management Area (FMA) and requires the creation of a Special Protection Zone (SPZ) of approximately 100 hectares of suitable habitat¹ when there are verified reports of:

- more than two individuals per hectare;

- more than 10 individuals per kilometre;
- more than 15 individuals per hour of spotlighting; or
- substantial populations located in isolated or unusual habitat,

Action Statement protection (state-wide):

In November 2019, the Victorian Government released the Greater Glider Action Statement (Action Statement). The Action Statement sets out a range of management actions to ensure that the species survives and flourishes in Victoria's native forests. It includes a state-wide prescription for protecting Greater Gliders from impacts of timber harvesting (Intended Management Action 5). This prescription states that if "a density of Greater Gliders equal to or greater than five individuals per spotlight kilometre (or equivalent measure) is identified", then retention of "at least 40% of the basal area of eucalypts across each timber harvesting coupe, prioritising live, hollow bearing trees" is required.

Both prescriptions currently apply. While Intended Management Action 5 states that it replaces the prescription in the Code, the Code prescription, by law, will apply until such a time that the Code is reviewed and amended accordingly. VicForests has committed to implementing both prescriptions until relevant amendments are made.

What is the Conservation Regulator's role in protecting Greater Gliders?

The Conservation Regulator ensures that timber harvesting operations and associated activities in Victoria's state forests are planned and conducted in accordance with the regulatory framework.

While the Action Statement prescription is not yet formally part of the regulatory framework (in law), the Conservation Regulator will monitor and report on

¹ The Special Protection Zone can be combined with existing protection zones or National Parks.

Reporting detections of Greater Gliders

compliance with these measures across Victoria until Code amendments are made.

The Conservation Regulator uses information about Greater Glider sightings to help put protections in place. Some of this information is submitted by the public through the Forest Reports program. The Conservation Regulator also conducts its own surveys as part of its Forest Protection Survey Program (FPSP).

The FPSP was designed by a team of experts, botanists and fauna specialists, and aims to survey at least 80% of coupes planned for harvest each year. The data gathered from these survey programs builds a better understanding of the habitats and location of many threatened species, informs the application of protection measures, and helps provide a clear guide for the timber industry for pre-harvest planning.



As soon as the Conservation Regulator receives a Forest Report where a prescription might apply, VicForests is notified and ceases harvesting until the detection can be verified.

Reporting detections of Greater Gliders to the Conservation Regulator

Anyone can submit survey information as a 'Forest Report' to the Conservation Regulator via email (forest.reports@delwp.vic.gov.au).

A Forest Report needs to contain the right information and be conducted in a consistent, rigorous manner in order to support the application of protection measures under the Code and Action Statement.

If a Forest Report is submitted with insufficient information, they may be considered incomplete or unsubstantiated and therefore may not be used to inform protections.

Survey requirements

To ensure the validity and integrity of reported data, Forest Reports must follow the survey requirements outlined in:

- this Guidance Note;
- the Forest Reports website (see 'minimum information requirements'); and
- the Forest Protection Survey Program's Survey Guideline – Spotlighting and Call Playback (see 'Spotlighting for Arboreal Mammals').

Examples of acceptable arrangements of transects are provided in **Figure 1** below. Examples of requirements include (please note, this is not a complete summary):

Basic methodology

- spotlighting surveys should be undertaken by two surveyors on foot (at an average pace of 10 minutes per 100 metres) and cover a total distance of as close to one kilometre as possible per transect;

Transect length and shape (both prescriptions)

- transects should avoid unnecessary bends to reduce the risks of double counts;
- if a single transect line (one kilometre) is not possible, alternative arrangements can be made, such as multiple transects that add up to one kilometre within and adjacent to the coupe;
- if surveying occurs across multiple transects that add up to one kilometre, they should be spaced a minimum distance of 150 metres apart (to avoid double counts) and a maximum distance of 250 metres apart;

Transect length and shape (Action Statement only)

These transect rules (which relate to coupe boundaries) only apply to the Action Statement prescription. This is because Action Statement produces protection areas within a specific coupe. This differs from the Code prescription, which applies broader protections to suitable habitat in the general vicinity of verified records.

- the focus of the transect should be on the area within the gross coupe boundary (the boundary of the whole coupe, without taking into account areas such as Special Protection Zones where harvesting cannot be carried out);
- transect start or end points may be up to 100 metres (in total) outside the gross coupe boundary;
- transects may also be located outside the coupe if they run parallel to the gross coupe boundary and are within 25 metres of the boundary;

Reporting detections of Greater Gliders

- a single transect that runs parallel to the boundary of two adjacent coupes for one kilometre and is within 25 metres of the boundary of both coupes may be used to trigger prescriptions for both coupes;

Recording detections

- detections of individual to assess against relevant thresholds are to be assessed within a single night. Individuals cannot be tallied across several nights of surveying to avoid double counting;

Submitting transect data

- Forest Reports should include transect data (information about the track walked while surveying, as opposed to just the point data of Greater Glider detections). Ideally, this is best submitted in a spatial format (.gpx rather than .pdf) to allow for further data analysis if required. This reduces requests for further information from report sources; and
- transect data should be submitted as a single track for each night of surveying. There is no requirement to submit individual tracklogs of each observer for every night of spotlighting.

Triggering a prescription

Applicable factors

The Conservation Regulator considers a prescription to be triggered for a coupe where the survey method within these guidelines has been applied and a relevant detection threshold is met either for the:

- Code of Practice (East Gippsland FMA): more than two individuals per hectare, more than 10 individuals per kilometre, more than 15 individuals per hour of spotlighting, or substantial populations are located in isolated or unusual habitat; and/or
- Action Statement (state-wide): five or more unique Greater Gliders are found per spotlight kilometre.

How does the Conservation Regulator assess a report?

Minimum standard

After receiving a report, the Conservation Regulator will first confirm that the survey that produced the detection was carried out in accordance with the survey standards referred to in this Guidance Note.

If this is not the case, the Conservation Regulator may contact the submitter to request further information, or the Forest Report may be deemed as unable to be assessed.

Prescription assessment

The Conservation Regulator will then assess the information to determine if a relevant detection threshold has been met, and if so, what prescription applies.

If the Conservation Regulator forms a view that a detection threshold has been met:

- Code of Practice (East Gippsland FMA): the Conservation Regulator undertakes further field verification, during which no harvesting will occur in the vicinity of the detections. If detections are confirmed, an SPZ is applied.
- Action Statement (state-wide): the Conservation Regulator informs VicForests with the expectation that at least 40% of the pre-harvest gross coupe basal area (m²/ha) will be retained.

The Conservation Regulator informs VicForests of possible detection of a threatened species as soon as possible and, on average, within half a working day of receiving a threatened species report.

Information sharing

Detections contained within all Forest Reports are forwarded to VicForests for consideration in planning and operations. This occurs regardless of whether surveys meet the minimum standards (although noncompliant data will not be used to inform formal prescriptions). This allows VicForests to voluntarily implement a higher level of protection.

Confidentiality

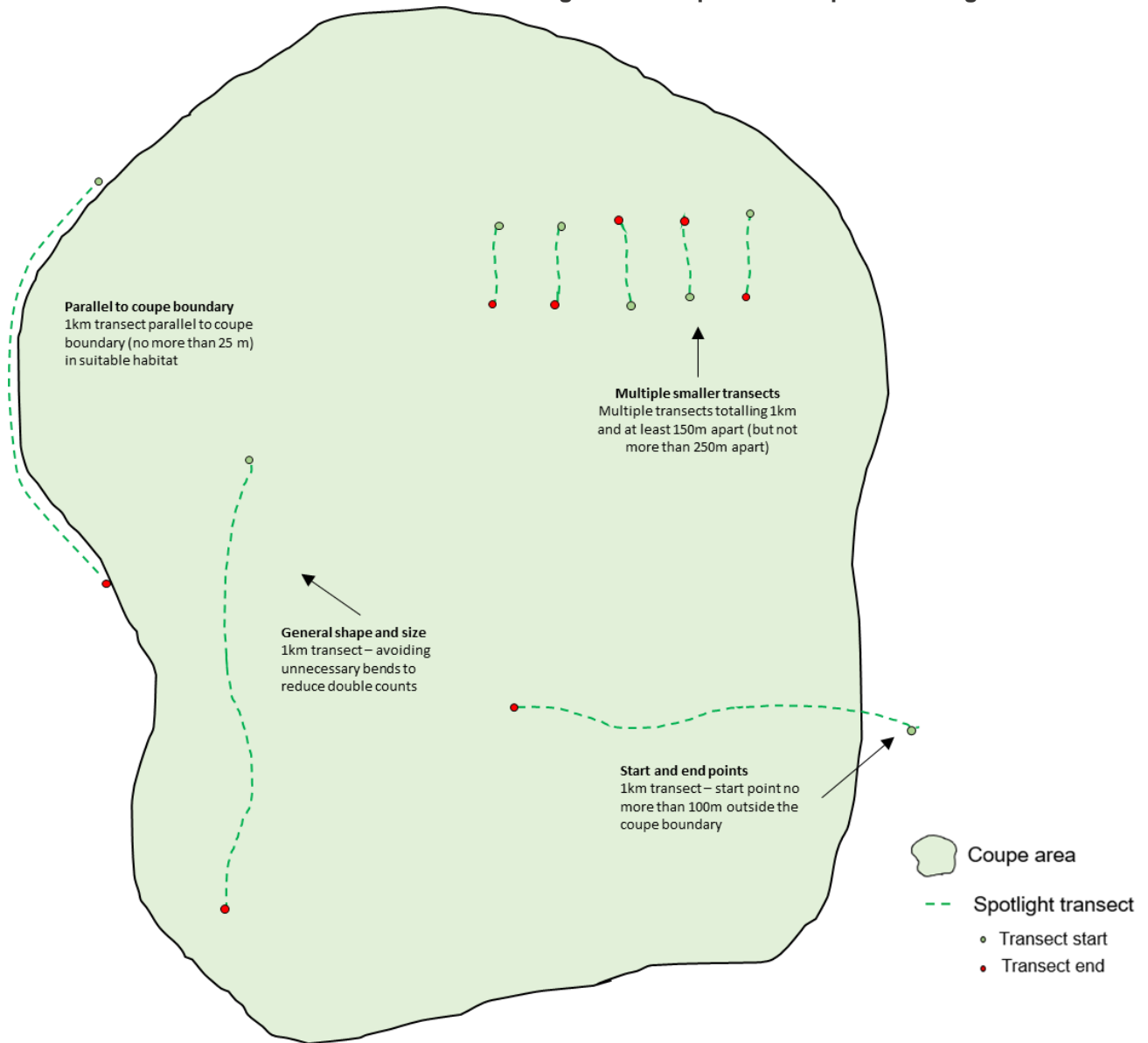
The Conservation Regulator takes the confidentiality of report sources seriously. No information provided to VicForests will contain the identity of any group or individual involved in or associated with the collection or provision of information to us.

More information

For more information on submitting information to the Conservation Regulator about Greater Gliders, please contact us via email (forest.reports@delwp.vic.gov.au).

Reporting detections of Greater Gliders

Figure 1 Examples of acceptable arrangement of transects



© The State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2021



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. You are free to re-use the work under that licence, on the condition that you credit the State of Victoria as author. The licence does not apply to any images, photographs or branding, including the Victorian Coat of Arms, the Victorian Government logo and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) logo. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Disclaimer

This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.

Accessibility

If you would like to receive this publication in an alternative format, please telephone the DELWP Customer Service Centre on 136186, email customer.service@delwp.vic.gov.au, or via the National Relay Service on 133 677 www.relayservice.com.au. This document is also available on the internet at www.delwp.vic.gov.au.