

OTWAY REGIONAL FOREST REFERENCE GROUP

SABINE FALLS

PURPOSE

1. To brief the Otways Regional Forest Reference Group on the issues relating to Sabine Falls Scenic Waterfall Reserve and proposals to harvest adjacent State forest.

BACKGROUND

2. Sabine Falls are located close to the eastern edge of the 10 hectare Scenic Waterfall Reserve in the parish of Wongarra. See attached land tenure map. To the west of the waterfall reserve is private property. A road reserve is located immediately to the north of the waterfall reserve and continues to the east along the northern boundary of the private property to Sunnyside Road. Reserved Forest borders the scenic reserve and road reserve to the west and north. Parks Victoria manage the scenic reserve. NRE manages the adjacent State forest.
3. Timber harvesting during the 1930s and 40s can be seen in the catchment surrounding the waterfalls in the attached aerial photograph. The forest surrounding the falls today is largely regrowth forest arising from these harvesting events.
4. During the 1970s a walking track leading to a viewing platform 100- 200m downstream from the falls were constructed under an employment program. The last 500m of the walking track and the viewing platform are located on private property. It is not clear whether this was done with the consent of the landowner.
5. In the 1992 Otway Forest Management Plan, the walking track and associated facilities at Sabine Falls were identified as high priorities for further development by the Department as a part of an overall forest recreation strategy. However, a subsequent review of the site revealed a number of issues which caused the Department to change this priority and direct funding to developments at Triplet Falls and Lake Elizabeth.
6. In the last few years, NRE has become concerned over safety issues associated with use of the substandard track and viewing platform facilities and have sought to discourage use of the site.
7. The bulk of the catchment for the Falls is on private plantation land to the north of the reserve. This area is being progressively harvested and re-established.

ISSUES

9. Following completion of the Regional Forest Agreement, NRE met with industry and conservation stakeholders in an attempt to negotiate an agreed Wood Utilisation Plan for the Otways. A key point which was not resolved was the need to secure sufficient coupes to ensure adequate supply of ash sawlogs to licensees. Two coupes in State forest General Management Zone, adjacent to Sabine Falls were identified by the Department as necessary to meet ash commitments without agreement from conservation stakeholders.
10. The Otway Ranges Walking Track Association (ORWTA) are developing a proposal for a long distance walking track through the Otways. ORWTA have advised that they regard the Sabine Falls area as a key element in their proposal and have objected to harvesting in the vicinity because of the impacts it may have on the landscape close to the waterfall.
11. During 2000/01, OREN and ORWTA led a campaign against harvesting near Sabine Falls. Issues raised include the impacts the harvesting will have on opportunities to develop an upgraded walking track to the Falls, impacts on perceived old growth forest and biodiversity,

impacts on water quality and impacts on regional tourism development. In response, the Minister for Environment and Conservation directed that the Department delay harvesting of the coupes concerned and requested the Otway Regional Forest Reference Group consider the issue.

COMMENT

12. In summarising key issues for Government consideration in the West RFA, the Independent Panel did not identify the values of Sabine Falls, the associated walking track and forests adjacent to the Falls as matters requiring further consideration. Few, if any of the 900 plus submissions into the RFA identified specific issues in relation to Sabine Falls. The issues have arisen after completion of the RFA.
13. Establishment of appropriate standard recreation facilities at Sabine Falls is hampered by the steepness of the site, by restricted views of the cascades from easily accessible points (see photograph of the view attached) and by the land tenure arrangements.
14. Development of walking and waterfall viewing facilities at Sabine Falls will require considerable investment to achieve NRE facility design standards (which aim to protect environmental values and ensure visitor safety).
15. The General Management Zone in this forest block forms part of the resource required to meet current sawlog licenses. Coupes on the ridge to the west of the waterfalls were included in the 2000/01 Wood Utilisation Plan.

OPTIONS

16. The general options available for consideration within the framework of the RFA are as follows:
 - (a) Harvest forest adjacent to Sabine Falls in accordance with the RFA and the current Wood Utilisation Plan.
 - (b) Include the forest adjacent to Sabine Falls in State forest Special Protection Zone and make compensatory changes to the extent of SPZ elsewhere in the Otways to ensure the area and available volume of ash timber resources is maintained at the level established by the RFA.
 - (c) Modify the planned extent or intensity of harvesting in the vicinity of Sabine Falls to maintain landscape values, and make changes to SPZ as necessary to compensate for any loss of access to timber resources.

RECOMMENDATION

17. That the Regional Forest Reference Group:
 - note the land tenure and physical limitations of the site in relation to development of improved recreational facilities at the falls:
 - consider the options outlined above in developing advice on a resolution to this issue.

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Prepared for Reference Group Meeting 2, 22 June 2001

Attachment

1. Land tenure map (Sabine Falls Scenic Waterfalls Reserve Parcel P081320)
2. 19-16 aerial photo image.
3. View from the observation platform.