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VicForests partners with leading universities in forest research

VicForests has partnered with leading universities to obtain Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project grants for two collaborative biodiversity research projects.

VicForests' General Manager Stakeholders and Planning, Nathan Trushell, said the research would work towards developing new models and techniques to assist the long-term survival of threatened species such as the Leadbeater's Possum.

"These grants are an important step for forest management in Victoria and VicForests' research efforts," said Mr Trushell.

"Together, the projects will see funding of approximately \$1 million dollars going towards biodiversity research in Victoria's forests.

"VicForests has been working towards developing our research capacity and involvement. We recognise that research and monitoring are particularly important links in the cycle of adaptive management and continual improvement in forest management.

"We have conducted a number of internal and collaborative research projects and our staff have published peer-reviewed papers on issues from threatened species management frameworks to the relationship between fire and forestry," he said.

One of the ARC projects will look at ways of accelerating the development of key features of Leadbeater's Possum habitat in collaboration with research scientists from the University of Melbourne, the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, and the Arthur Rylah Institute.

"The ideal habitat for the Leadbeater's Possum is large old trees with hollows to nest in and a dense understory for foraging. Younger Mountain Ash trees do not generally have hollows, with the large hollows used by a colony of Leadbeater's Possums typically not developing for up to 190 years," Mr Trushell said.

"This collaborative project will look at ways in which these important habitat features can be developed over a shorter time period using a range of different approaches.

"The outcomes of this research will help guide the way our forests are managed on a larger scale including enhance the habitat in areas currently unsuitable for species such as the Leadbeater's Possum including areas outside existing reserves.

"This will help to improve the long-term survival of the species, in line with the Leadbeater's Possum Advisory Group recommendations," he said.

The second ARC linkage project will be in collaboration with Forestry Tasmania, University of Tasmania and the University of Melbourne.

“This second project will investigate how forest biodiversity is distributed across the landscape with a particular focus on how distance from mature forest patches influences the local biodiversity,” Mr Trushell said.

“This project will use three new and quite 'cutting edge' approaches for more cost-efficient measurement of biodiversity including integrated remote sensing for plants, next generation DNA technology for beetles and analysis of acoustic recording for birds.

“This information will assist in developing tools to support future sustainable forest management planning.

“Both of these projects are a significant step forward in VicForests research portfolio, not only involving us in world class, high-quality research, but also by providing us with tangible decision support tools for ecologically sustainable forest management,” he said.