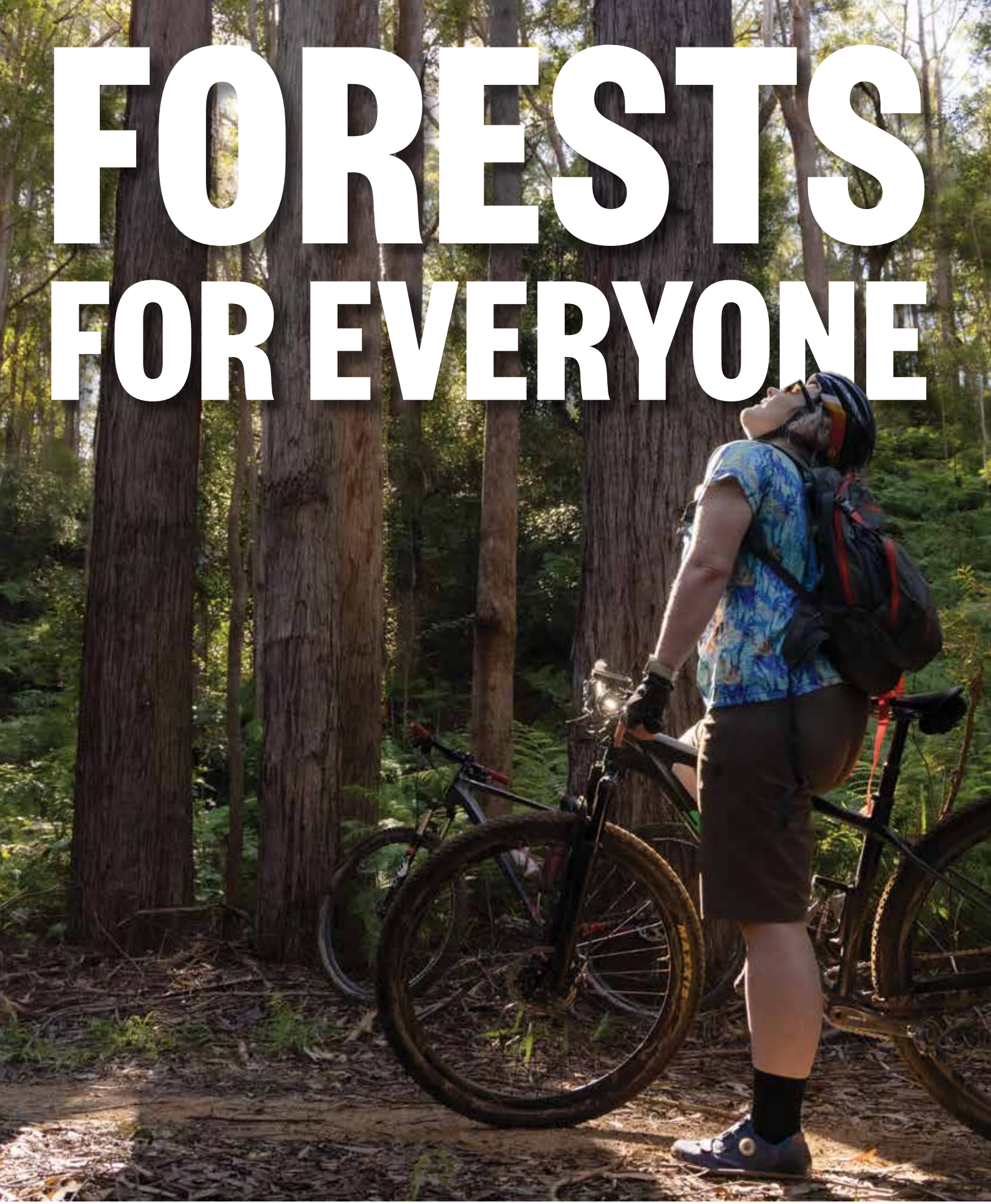
FORESTS FOR EVERYONE



A new era for South East Queensland's native State Forests

PROTECT BEAUTIFUL QUEENSLAND

Photo: Ben Blanche

PROTECT BEAUTIFUL QUEENSLAND

Protect Beautiful Queensland is an alliance of conservation, First Nations, natural resource management, tourism and recreation organisations. We are working towards a common goal of growing Queensland's protected area estate and improving its management for the benefit and enjoyment of all Queenslanders, our wildlife, communities, culture, and businesses.

Our alliance is committed to non-partisan, evidence-based solutions to achieve the target of doubling Queensland's protected areas to 17% by 2030.

We are working together with Traditional Owners, local communities, farmers, scientists, recreational users, outdoors industry representatives and government agencies to create new and well-managed protected areas, so we can secure a healthy future nature and our treasured way of life.

We want all Queenslanders and future generations to have greater access to the beautiful nature that our state has in abundance. We are committed to fostering equitable access and inclusive management. We embrace collaborative efforts for lasting protection and conservation of natural and cultural values across all land tenures.

Our vision is to double Queensland's protected areas by 2030 in well-managed parks, private protected areas and Indigenous protected areas with inclusive, collaborative and well-funded management arrangements.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians. We recognise the diverse cultures, histories and heritage of the many countries across Queensland and their deep connection to the lands, waters and seas. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded, and our work would not be possible without the trust, support and strength of First Nations People. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Authorised by D. Copeman, 377 Montague Rd West End QLD
Front cover photo: Ben Blanche
Rear cover photo: Suzanne Pearson

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Queensland boasts some of the most outstanding natural and living cultural landscapes remaining in the world. Our native forests are incredibly diverse and harbour much of our iconic and endangered wildlife.

Greater gliders, koalas, quolls, glossy black cockatoos and many more threatened species can be found in Queensland's native state forests.

The cessation of logging in the South East Queensland (SEQ) planning region has resulted in the allocation of up to 13,193 hectares for recreation and conservation across 12 of the region's state forests. But approximately 50,000 hectares remain unallocated.

These state forests are close to highly populated areas and are valued by local communities for their recreational opportunities, including hiking, mountain biking, horse-riding, four-wheel driving and other activities. Where appropriate, these activities should be maintained and supported through dedicated facilities, access points and outreach for their sustainable ongoing use.

> **These forests present a strategic opportunity to establish conservation parks with a recreational focus.**

Historic logging tracks are often suitable for activities such as mountain biking, horse riding, scenic driving and providing access to campsites. With careful planning, ecological values can be improved while enhancing access to nature for a wide range of outdoor enthusiasts in one of Australia's fastest growing regions.

Recreation groups and conservationists are advocating for the designation of these areas as conservation parks. Transitioning these state forests into conservation parks will create new recreation, tourism, and lifestyle opportunities, while showing that the Queensland Government is responsive to community expectations.

Queenslanders love nature, with polling showing that 77% want more national parks, and 71% support a doubling of parks by 2030. These figures are supported by enthusiastic public use of national parks, with almost two thirds of Queenslanders having visited a national park in the last 12 months.[1]

The expansion of protected areas is central to the outdoor recreation sector, which in turn delivers significant health and economic benefits for Queenslanders, and to Queensland's tourism industry, a major pillar of our economy. Over 90% of Queenslanders say national parks are important for their lifestyle.[2]

Tourism contributes $37.6 billion annually to Queensland's economy and sustains over 277,000 jobs across 65,000 businesses.[3] Nature-based tourism is a high-growth sector delivering strong returns on public investment. National Parks generate approximate 17,241 jobs across the tourism industry.[4]

> **With the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games on the horizon, Queensland has an unprecedented opportunity to show global leadership in conservation and sustainable tourism.**

Many international tourists now look for genuine environmental credentials, and the government's ambition for 45 eco-tourism products by 2045[5] will only succeed with carefully planned, coordinated investment in product development and in the growth and management of protected areas.

Recommendations

The Queensland Government should:

- Confirm there will be no loss to outdoor activity opportunities arising from future land tenure changes.
- In partnership with First Nations groups, initiate community consultation to help inform future land use.
- Work with the outdoor recreation, tourism and conservation sectors to identify priority land use options to determine future management and tenure arrangements.
- Confirm an end to timber harvesting and update policy statements to include the transition of an additional 50,000 hectares into the most appropriate tenures to maintain their natural, cultural and social values.

Photo: Ben Blanche

BACKGROUND

In 1999, the Southeast Queensland Forest Agreement (SEQ FA) was signed by the Queensland Government, Queensland Conservation Council (QCC), Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, The Wilderness Society, and the then Queensland Timber Board.

Under the SEQ FA, 425,000 hectares of native forest was protected in national and conservation parks with an agreed phase out of 25 years for the remaining areas of native forests.

It was agreed that remaining areas of state forests, from Gladstone in the north to the New South Wales border in the south, would only be logged as a last resort, with protection secured no later than the end of 2024.

However, changes in government and subsequent policy directions since the initial agreement have resulted in divergent policy positions from Queensland's major parties.

While the LNP Newman Government announced in 2013 the agreement was no longer in place, the Labor Palaszczuk and Miles governments made a partial recommitment in 2019 to transition remaining state forests in the SEQ planning area into protected areas. The Labor Miles government also commenced a statewide review of native forests in 2024.

These state forests, located close to highly populated areas, are valued for their recreational opportunities such as hiking, mountain biking, horse-riding, and scenic driving.

The LNP Crisafulli government is yet to make a firm commitment about the direction of publicly owned native state forests in SEQ and more broadly. Indications suggest that Queensland's state-owned native forests may remain available for timber harvesting in an ongoing basis. Consultation on the *Queensland Future Timber Plan* is scheduled for finalisation in October 2025.

Relevant policies and commitments

The Queensland Government has a suite of interrelated policies that are shaping the future of public land use. Together, these and other policies will set the direction for how Queensland will protect nature, manage forests, and grow sustainable nature-based tourism over the coming decades.

Protected Area Strategy 2020-2030

The *Queensland Protected Area Strategy* is a ten-year framework to guide the growth, management and community connection of the state's protected area network. To deliver growth in protected areas, the Strategy identifies ten priority actions. This includes transitioning more state forests into the protected area estate.

> "Accelerate conversion of up to 20,000 hectares of forestry land to protected area and undertake further assessment of additional forestry land for potential conversion as hardwood forestry harvesting is ceased."[6]

While there has been progress on the 20,000 hectare target, there remains increasing opportunity for more areas to transition, as forestry activities have already ceased in many areas of SEQ.

Queensland Future Timber Plan

The Crisafulli government's recently released *Queensland Future Timber Plan* provides a 25 year blueprint to increase timber supply across 51.75 million hectares of forest.

The plan has been drafted with input from the timber industry, housing sector, farming and agriculture and other related sectors. Scientific, conservation, recreation and tourism sector input was not invited. Public consultation will run for four weeks from the release of the plan.

Destination 2045

Queensland's *Destination 2045 plan* strongly emphasises nature-based tourism, forest experiences, and outdoor recreation, including areas near Brisbane. The plan commits to delivering 45 new ecotourism experiences across the state by 2045 and pairs with the *Ecotourism Plan for Queensland's Protected Areas 2025–2030* to streamline permissions, upgrade infrastructure in parks, and fund new ranger roles to protect forests and biodiversity while enabling visitor access.

The strategy aims to foster sustainable nature-based tourism and recreation in and around forests - including those within easy reach of Brisbane - by enhancing access, collaboration with Traditional Owners, and investment in the supporting infrastructure.

Photo: Ben Blanche

Photo: Nick Gibbs

COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

In early 2022, the Queensland Government announced plans to harvest logs from Beerwah State Forest, adjacent to Ewen Maddock Dam on the Sunshine Coast. Within hours of harvesting notices appearing at the trailhead of one of the region's most popular mountain biking trails, a grassroots community of mountain bikers, walkers and conservationists had established the 'Save Ferny Forest' group.

On 14 December 2022, logging plans were abandoned - largely due to community opposition led by the Save Ferny Forest group - and Ferny Forest has now become Mooloolah Conservation Park.

> **Across SEQ, community groups are calling for an end to native forest logging and the protection of the remaining State Forests.**

Importantly, the call for protection is broad and inclusive of existing users.

The transition of SEQ state forests into other appropriate tenures provides a crucial opportunity for the Queensland Government to reset the relationship between outdoor user groups, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the conservation sector.

Public attitudes towards national parks

In 2024, polling commissioned by the Queensland Conservation Council revealed strong public support for more national parks.[7]

- 77% of Queenslanders want more national parks.
- 76% of South East Queenslanders want more national parks.
- 71% of Queenslanders want to double the number of national parks by 2030.
- 43% of Queenslanders are more likely to vote for a party that promises to double the number of national parks.
- 64% of Queenslanders visited a national park in the last 12 months.
- 90% of Queenslanders agree that having more parks is important for their lifestyle.

OUR STATE FORESTS

In 2021, the Queensland Conservation Council commissioned Protected Area Solutions to undertake a review of the conservation values of State Forests within the SEQ Planning Area.[8]

Nineteen state forests were identified as high priorities for protection, totaling 68,543 hectares. About 13,193 hectares have already transitioned into conservation or national parks and up to 50,000 hectares remain unallocated.

These state forests are across the traditional homelands of the Yuggera Ugarupol, Kabi Kabi, Jinibara and Wakka Wakka Peoples.

The state forests are home to at least 39 threatened species including the koala, greater glider, Richmond birdwing, wild macadamia nut, rare orchids and rock wallabies.

South East Queensland's native state forests are rich in biodiversity, cultural significance, and recreational value. With forestry operations ceased or ceasing, now is the time to deliver on long-standing commitments and community expectations by protecting these forests for current and future generations.

Designating these areas as national parks, conservation parks and recreation reserves will enhance biodiversity, support climate resilience, grow nature-based tourism, and provide inclusive access to nature for all Queenslanders.

BEERBURRUM WEST STATE FOREST

Found 30 minutes from Caboolture, Beerburrum West State Forest is an important mountain bike hub, adds an important forested section to scenic drives and provides critical connectivity to adjacent protected areas in a fragmented landscape. The Hennessey Hill Downhill Mountain Bike Trail, which is managed by the Sunshine Coast Council, also occurs within this state forest.

Although much of Beerburrum West is plantation, there is approximately 2,517 hectares of remnant native vegetation adjacent to existing conservation and national parks, which would benefit from the addition and management of adjacent native forest.

There are two endangered regional ecosystems and habitats for several threatened species including the powerful owl and a number of threatened plant species. In 2024, 890 hectares of this native forest was added to Glass House Mountains Conservation Park[9], leaving approximately 1,600 hectares still requiring protection.

The powerful owl (Ninox strenua). Photo: JJ Harrison

Photo: Ben Blanche

BENARKIN STATE FOREST

Parts of Benarkin State Forest have exceptionally high values for poorly protected and endangered ecosystems and are of state significance. The forest is characterised by extensive areas of dry vine forest - otherwise known as dry rainforest - and supports habitat for greater gliders, koalas, black-breasted button-quails and brush-tailed rock-wallabies.

While there are plantation forests within Benarkin, the area recommended for protection includes only the larger areas of intact and remnant native vegetation. About 9,941 hectares is recommended for addition to the existing Benarkin National Park which is only 218 hectares in size. An appropriate tenure to allow for existing outdoor recreational use should be considered.

The greater glider (Petauroides armillatus). Photo: Suzanne Pearson

While plantations have been established in much of Benarkin, there are still extensive areas of natural hoop-pine dominated dry rainforests. In this photo, plantation occurs along the ridge while natural forest occurs on the slope. Photo: Ben Blanche

DEONGWAR STATE FOREST

Deongwar State Forest provides an opportunity for the creation of new recreational activities that protect conservation values in line with broad community aspirations. This 4,721 hectare forest is located between Esk and Hampton within the Somerset Regional Council area.

Deongwar State Forest is an important regional wildlife corridor, and its protection would connect Pine Cliff Nature Refuge at its northern boundary with Ravensbourne Nature Refuge and Ravensbourne National Park at the south. The region contains key areas of rainforest and wet sclerophyll forest.

Recreational cycling is popular in this area, with the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail increasing visitation to the region.[10] Further, there is strong support for appropriate mountain biking trails in Deongwar State Forest from local groups including Care4Esk, Save Deongwar and other local mountain bike riders.

Equestrian groups have identified Deongwar State Forest as a key area for continued access and improved facilities.[11]

Photos: Rob Williams

DIAPER STATE FOREST

Diaper State Forest is continuous with the recently declared Squirrel Creek National Park and supports similar values including extensive areas of core koala habitat and subtropical rainforests.

This state forest holds high biodiversity value and is of state significance. It contains threatened and underrepresented ecosystems, provides core habitat for priority species, and functions as a climate refuge and biodiversity corridor. It offers strong potential to enhance Queensland's protected area network and ecological resilience.

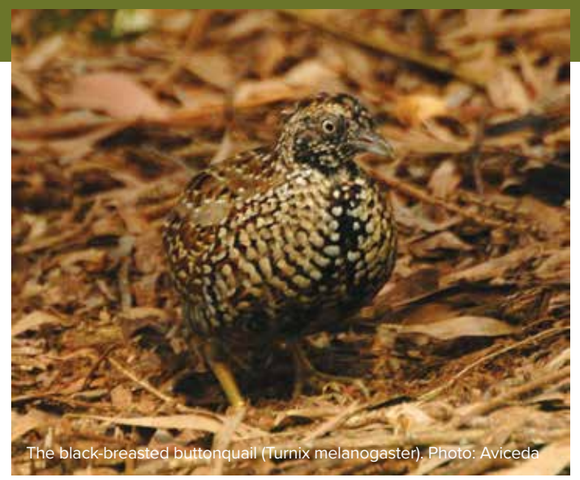
The plumed frogmouth (Podargus ocellatus plumiferus). Photo: Deborah Metters

Photo: Neil Ennis

EAST NANANGO STATE FOREST

East Nanango State Forest is found to the north of Benarkin State Forest and is a mosaic of remnant native forest and plantation. Approximately 1,112 hectares of this state forest have been identified as a priority for protection.

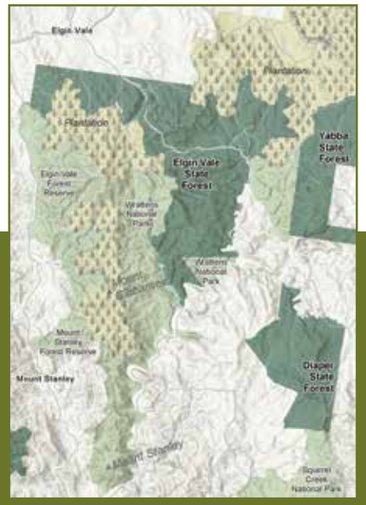
This area is of state significance and forms part of an important biodiversity corridor linking Benarkin to nearby forests of the Conondale Ranges. It includes strategic remnants of Hoop Pine vine forests and is an important refugia for many species including the vulnerable black-breasted button-quail.



The black-breasted buttonquail (Turnix melanogaster). Photo: Aviceda

Photo: South Burnett Rail Trail

ELGIN VALE STATE FOREST



A further 5,581 hectares of Elgin Vale State Forest have been identified as a high priority for conservation.

Part of a biodiversity corridor of state significance, it is adjacent to existing protected areas and provides habitat for several threatened species including the spot-tailed quoll, black-breasted button-quail and the squatter pigeon.

The forest includes extensive areas of rainforests which are continuous with Wrattens National Park - which was expanded by including 212 hectares of Elgin Vale State Forest in September 2024.

The squatter pigeon (Geophaps scripta scripta). Photo: Brian McCauley

Photo: Neil Ennis

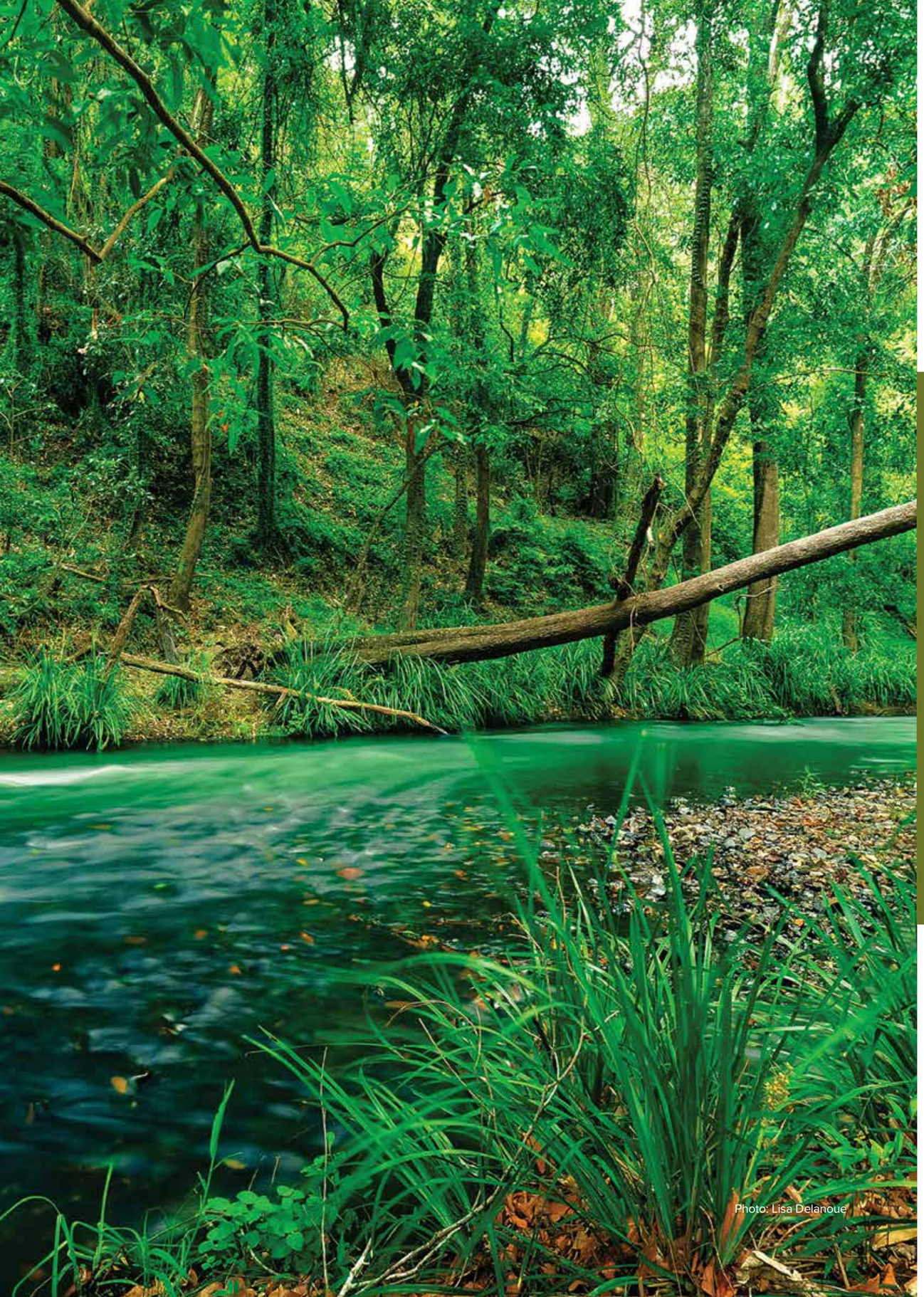


Photo: Lisa Delanoue

IMBIL STATE FOREST

Imbil State Forest is over 16,000 hectares in size and supports both plantations and extensive areas of native forest. About 6,500 hectares of Imbil State Forest have been identified as a priority for conservation.

It supports endangered and of concern regional ecosystems including habitat for approximately 20 threatened species. Protection of these areas is of high priority.

The black-breasted button-quail has been recorded at Imbil and the area is also habitat for Coxen's fig-parrot, spot-tailed quoll, greater glider, cascade tree frog and two wild species of macadamia nut.

The cascade tree frog (Ranoidea pearsoniana). Photo: FroggyDarb (Flickr)

YABBA STATE FOREST

Yabba State Forest holds high conservation value, with 91% of its area rated of state significance and supporting diverse, underrepresented ecosystems. It provides critical habitat for threatened species, including koalas, and is a centre of endemism and species richness.

The forest functions as a key climate refuge and biodiversity corridor, with extensive riverine wetlands and strong ecological connectivity. Its proximity to Wrattens National Park (which was expanded by 576 hectares in 2024) offers clear opportunities for expanding and strengthening the protected area network.

Yabba State Forest has long been proposed for protection by the broader conservation community and is part of a complex aggregation of land unit parcels that would be better managed as a protected area.

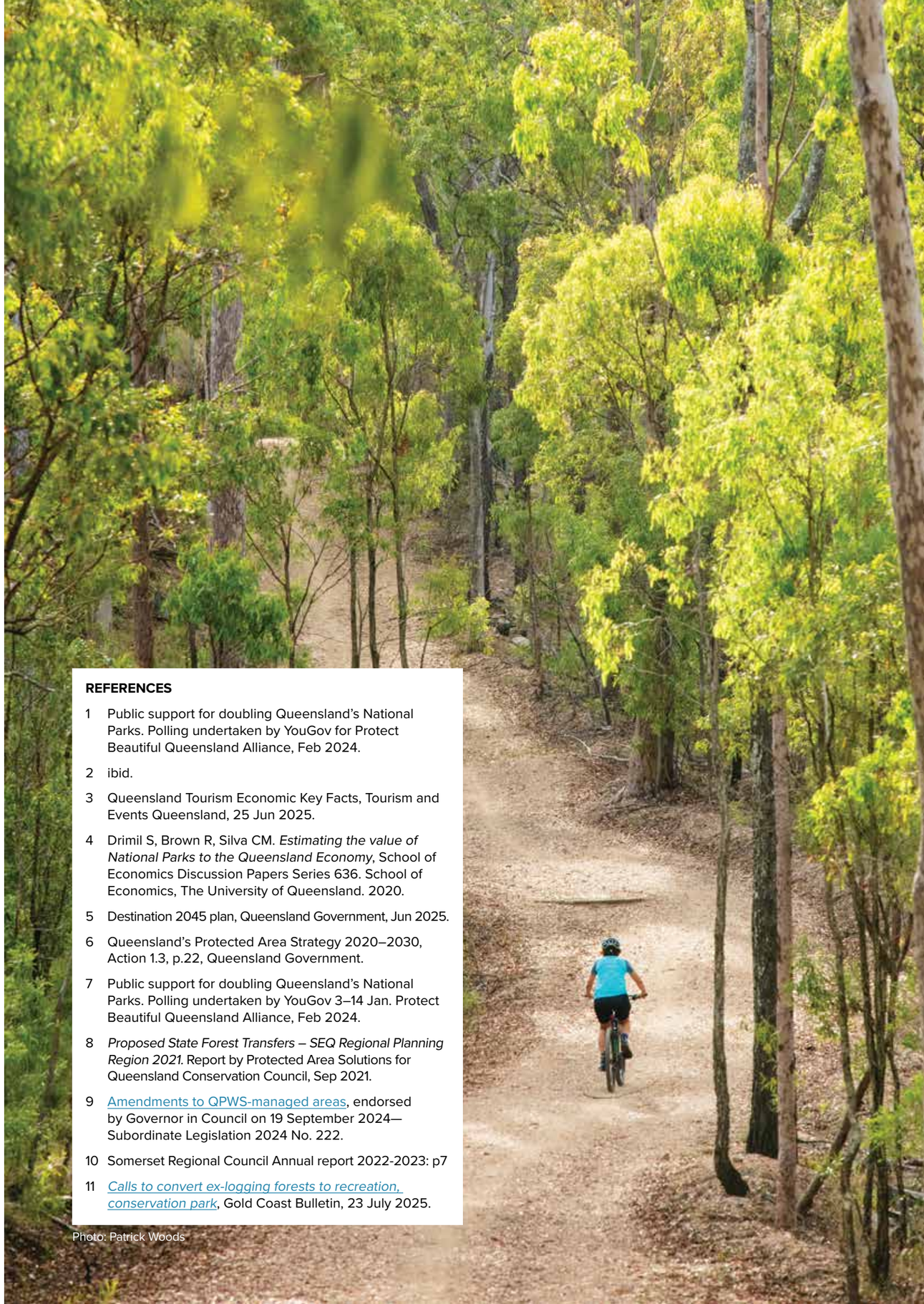
The spectacular Yabba falls are in a small scenic reserve that would be better protected by including the surrounding state forests into a conservation or national park.

Logging in Yabba State Forest. Photo: Patrick Woods

Yabba falls scenic reserve. Photo: Patrick Woods

APPENDIX 1: STATE FORESTS IDENTIFIED AS A PRIORITY FOR CONSERVATION

State forest	Area recommended for protection (hectares)	Area protected since 2022 (hectares)	Notes
Beerburrum West	2,517	1,119	Sections adjacent to Glasshouse Mountains NP
Beerwah	129	129	Lot 1 AP22457
Bellthorpe	480	480	Links two sections of existing Bellthorpe NP
Benarkin	10,148	0	Sections adjacent to Benarkin NP
D'aguilar	209	0	Area in western section
Deer Reserve	1,834	1,095	Excluding small area of plantation
Delaneys Creek	290	290	Important koala habitat
Deongwar	4,722	0	Area adjacent to Ravensbourne NP
Diaper	2,179	0	Important part of Conondale complex
East Nanango	1112	0	North-east section
Elgin Vale	5,793	212	Eastern section
Imbil 1	8,130	0	Southern section
Jimna	6,298	843	North-west section
Luttons	183	181	Western section
Mt Stanley 1	103	0	Area adjacent Forest Reserve
Peachester	738	657	Koala habitat
Squirrel Creek	6,615	6,462	Important part of Conondale complex
West Cooroy	1,154	1,150	State biodiversity corridor, koala habitat
Yabba State Forest	15,909	576	Important part of Conondale complex
Total	**68,543**	**13,194**	
	55,349	**REMAINING AREA RECOMMENDED FOR FURTHER PROTECTION**	



REFERENCES

1 Public support for doubling Queensland's National Parks. Polling undertaken by YouGov for Protect Beautiful Queensland Alliance, Feb 2024.

2 ibid.

3 Queensland Tourism Economic Key Facts, Tourism and Events Queensland, 25 Jun 2025.

4 Drimil S, Brown R, Silva CM. *Estimating the value of National Parks to the Queensland Economy*, School of Economics Discussion Papers Series 636. School of Economics, The University of Queensland. 2020.

5 Destination 2045 plan, Queensland Government, Jun 2025.

6 Queensland's Protected Area Strategy 2020–2030, Action 1.3, p.22, Queensland Government.

7 Public support for doubling Queensland's National Parks. Polling undertaken by YouGov 3–14 Jan. Protect Beautiful Queensland Alliance, Feb 2024.

8 *Proposed State Forest Transfers – SEQ Regional Planning Region 2021*. Report by Protected Area Solutions for Queensland Conservation Council, Sep 2021.

9 Amendments to QPWS-managed areas, endorsed by Governor in Council on 19 September 2024—Subordinate Legislation 2024 No. 222.

10 Somerset Regional Council Annual report 2022-2023: p7

11 *Calls to convert ex-logging forests to recreation, conservation park*, Gold Coast Bulletin, 23 July 2025.

Photo: Patrick Woods