

## **The Ugly side of Fortis Creek NP Senseless habitat tree destruction**

In late Spring 2015, Clarence Environment Centre members visited the Fortis Creek National Park just 20km north-west of Grafton in northern New South Wales (NSW). So impressed were they at the marvelous array of rare and threatened flora along the way, we wrote a glowing article for this web site entitled “A walk in the Park”.

As a direct result of the brief report we had sent to the local Parks office, that we were asked to show staff where all the significant plants were, so they could ensure their protection.

Of course we agreed, but the trip was called off at the last moment. However, as we were dressed and prepared for the excursion, the two of us decided to take a walk in another section of the park in the expectation of another enjoyable excursion while adding to the species list.

We chose a trail along the southern edge of a recent prescribed hazard reduction burn, and there we discovered the ugly side of national parks under today's management, with scores of old-growth trees bulldozed after the fire. In fact almost every old tree within 40m of the trail on the northern side, and several on the unburned southern side, had been flattened.



**Scores of old-growth trees flattened for reasons unknown to us at this time**



This is not the first time we have seen this type of inexcusable action, but only previously in the face of an out of control wild-fire.



The loss to fauna of those destroyed habitat trees at Fortis Creek is incalculable, and the fauna occupying those hollows, including threatened species would undoubtedly have been killed or injured as a direct result of the action.

National Parks' staff must know that about half of all threatened fauna in NSW are tree-hollow dependent, and loss of habitat is the primary reason for their decline. What they may not

know, and what few in the general populace know, is the time frame required for those Eucalyptus trees to form hollows, which is literally hundreds of years.



**Hollows of the size pictured generally take up to 300 years to form in Blackbutts**

Research undertaken at the Australian National University has determined that: ***"The age at which trees form hollows suitable for occupancy by vertebrate fauna generally do not occur in Eucalypts that are less than 120-180 years , with large hollows remaining rare in eucalypts 220 years old (Mackowski (1984))."***

***Hollows in Blackbutt** (the main species destroyed at Fortis Creek) **that were suitable for occupancy by fauna did not occur in trees less than 144 years old and hollows suitable for 'large' animals did not occur in trees less than 224 years old. In south-east Queensland, most Blackbutt between 145 and 164 years old produced small hollows suitable for occupancy by fauna in trees more than 165 years old, and Scribbly Gum (Eucalyptus signata) at 200-235 years old (Wormington 1996). Large hollows (i.e. with a minimum entrance >10cm) in these species formed after approximately 240 and 300 years respectively"***

The reality is that many of these trees were already mature when Captain Cook sailed the coast line some 2½ centuries ago. They survived the timber getter's axe in the late 1800s because they were already too old to log, and now they have been senselessly destroyed.

Tourism is the life blood of the Clarence Valley, boosted by the fact that this region is one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, and supported by a range of national parks and world heritage areas, but what tourist wants to see this sort of thing?

To say we are disappointed would be an understatement. Frankly we are outraged, and demand that this policy, if it is policy, of environmental bastardy be changed.

Compiled by John Edwards  
Honorary Secretary