

2005 Softwood Project

Australian Forestry Management Pty Limited (AFM)



Forests NSW Annual Report

Financial Year 2011-2012

Legal Context

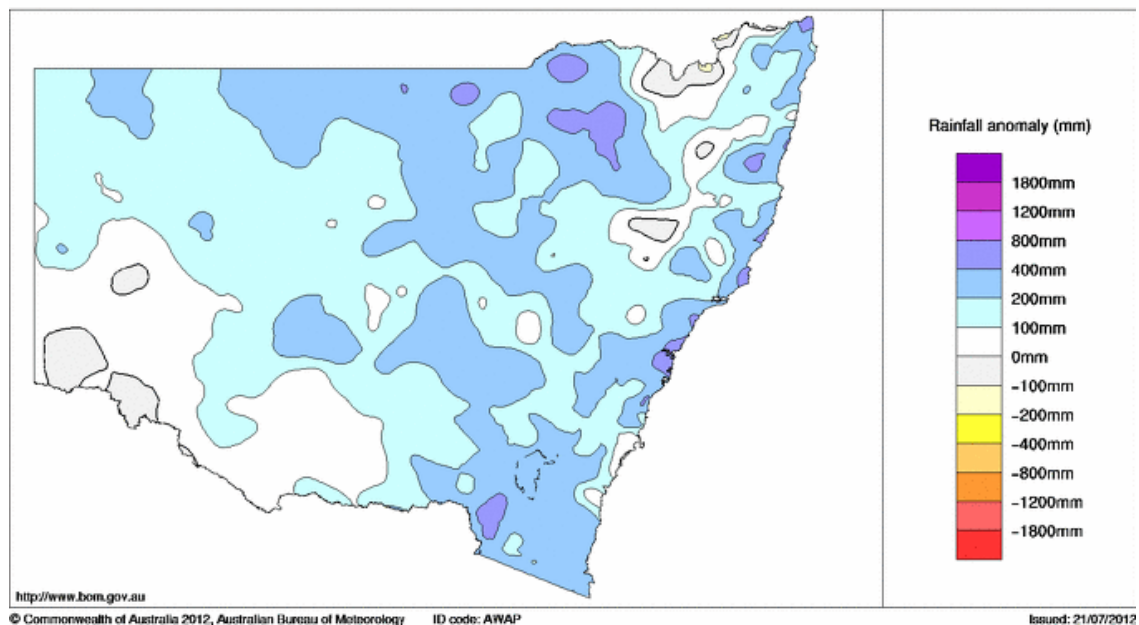
This annual report has been prepared in accordance with Schedule 1 Part 3(h) of the Forestry Management Contract between Australian Forestry Management Pty Limited and the Forestry Commission of New South Wales (Forests NSW) for the 2005 Softwood Project.

Overview

The 2005 Softwood Project comprises seven 2006 age class plantations blocks. All of the plantation blocks are located within the Hume Region near Tumut or Tumbarumba with the exception of Mingary Vale, which is located within Macquarie Region near Oberon.

Rainfall in both the Hume and Macquarie Regions was well above average (refer figure 1) with significant rainfall events occurring during spring and summer. Total rainfall at Tumbarumba from July 11 to June 12 was 1214mm compared to the long term average of 980mm. Total rainfall for Yass was 50% above the long term average. Rainfall in the Macquarie Region was well above average at 936mm versus the long term average of 638mm (see Appendix 1.). Critically, this rainfall was in the active growing period and resulted in an excellent year for the Age Class.

Figure 1: NSW Rainfall Anomalies (mm) 1 July 2011- 30 June 2012



This period of above average rainfall has resulted in generally good tree growth for all plantation areas.

The overall condition of the plantations remains good with some exceptions at Parkers and Ruby Creek where there are areas of low stocking. The low stocking areas are predominantly a legacy of the drought and pest issues.

Ongoing pest control remains a priority with some localised damage incurred in the majority of plantations. Restocking of small patches was completed during the winter 2010.

Stand Condition

The plantations are generally in good condition. Exceptions to this exist in sections of Parkers and Ruby Creek.

Mingary Vale (Transgrid)

The plantation is generally in very good condition. There has been an excellent growing season for the second consecutive year. Form is good and weeds, as noted last year, are no longer a serious source of competition.

Isolated areas of plantation remain affected by heavy grazing by kangaroos and wallabies. Discussions with Agriwealth will continue on the appropriate management of these areas.



Mingary Vale 2006 AC – Good growth and vigour (August 2011)



Mingary Vale – excellent access for forest management and protection activities.

Maragle Park

Satisfactory stocking, very good condition and growth. This plantation continues to perform well.



Maragle Park 2006 AC – July 2012



Mingary Vale – continued good growth and form in the stand.

Paddys River

Satisfactory stocking and growth. Trees have established site dominance and growth has been reasonable with the good seasonal conditions.



Paddy's River (in background) – July 2012

Parkers

Condition and growth at Parkers is variable. Stocking remains low following the drought in 2006/2007 over approximately 20% of the plantation as detailed in previous reports, including some areas that are unstocked. Tree form is poorer in these areas, which may affect future yield and wood quality. Trees replanted in these areas 2 to 3 years ago, are filling in some previously unstocked areas.

Growth of stocked areas is acceptable, with reasonable tree form of trees planted in 2006 and subsequent replants. An area of about 6 hectares has suffered from tree mortality associated waterlogged ground conditions as previously reported.

Low levels of *Dothistroma* needle blight infection is present in the low lying areas.



Parkers 2006 AC July 2012 – replants performing well.

Ruby Creek

Stocking is mostly adequate but variable, estimated to range from 600 to 800 stems per hectare. Replanting over the last couple of years has improved stocking in some of the previously poorly stocked areas, however on rocky and cold air drainage sites the survival of replanted trees has been low.

There are some areas, estimated to be about 25 hectares in extent, where stocking levels are low or very low. These areas are rocky and/or have been subject to very heavy bracken competition, which was not practical to control post establishment.

Growth of trees replanted in 2007 (majority of stock on this property) has been slow and affected by the past drought conditions and the cold temperatures experienced at this site. Tree condition and growth suffered a significant setback with hail damage in late 2011 as previously reported as plantation damage in February 2012. The current condition of the trees following the hail damage is starting to improve, and it is expected that it will continue to recover with future tree growth.



Ruby Creek 06 AC – July 2011



Ruby Creek 06 AC – Replant trees in middle ground

The Valley

The Valley plantation is predominantly well stocked and has acceptable tree growth.

There are localised areas surrounding drainage lines which are unstocked, or have low stocking due to poor drainage and frost killing the trees. Trees have generally stabilised from minor localised wind toppling has been previously observed and reported.

As previously reported, there is an area of about 5 hectares in Compartment 2007 where ongoing browse damage has reduced stocking to low levels.

The basin area of The Valley, previously reported as being affected by frost damage, has improved in condition with reasonable tree growth now evident. This area has three to five hectares of low stocking, due to frost mortality. Due to the small scale no remedial action is recommended.

Vans

Generally, the Vans plantation has very good growth with acceptable stocking. Tree health during recent months has been affected by a high level of dothistroma needle blight infection.

Areas that were waterlogged during periods of high rainfall since 2010 resulted in a loss of stocked area that is estimated to be one or two hectares in extent.



Vans 2006 AC showing affects of Dothistroma - July 12

Pest and Disease Information

Dothistroma needle blight is a fungal infection that kills needles in the lower portion of the tree crown, reducing tree growth. It is only observed at significant infection rates following wet cool summers, as has been experienced in the last two years, and generally affecting areas where moist cool air is pooled in the landscape, often the lower slopes of valleys.

Infection levels vary across the region. A small proportion of plantations infected to a moderate or high level are being strongly considered for aerial application of copper based fungicide to reduce infection levels. This will include the Van's plantation. Any treatment operations that may occur will be applied in a consistent manner across FNSW and AgriWealth plantation estates.

Due to increased tree size, browsing at most properties is now at low levels.

Feral pig trapping and poisoning continued during the report period on properties where pig populations were present.

Deer hunting by selected members of the Australian Deer Association has been authorised on properties where deer populations are likely to cause excessive tree damage.

At Ruby Creek wild horses continue to be present on neighbouring properties and an unfenced portion of the plantation. The majority of the Ruby Creek plantation has been fenced by Forests NSW to exclude wild horses. This initiative has been reasonably successful and significantly reduced damage by wild horses. Forests NSW is mindful that the local and general community remain sensitive to the issue of the management of wild horses.

Mingary Vale – The feral pig population looks to be more evident this year and ongoing monitoring of the site will determine if a formal control program is required.

Fire Incidents

There were no fire incidents within or in close proximity to the plantations.

Summary of Activities Undertaken 2011/2012

- Replanting and follow up herbicide in understocked areas Ruby Creek
- Pest animal control
- Maintenance of tracks and access roads
- Fire risk reduction works and surveillance
- Grazing at Van's to reduce the fire hazard.

Summary of Activities Planned for 2012/2013

- Dothistoma control using aerial application of copper based fungicide
- Pest animal control, including management of wild horses at Ruby Creek
- Maintenance of roads and tracks
- Fire risk reduction works and surveillance
- Grazing where it is assessed that there will be minimal tree damage, particularly Mingary Vale.
- Restocking and spot herbicide treatment at Ruby Creek in localised understocked areas in Winter 2012 with a preceding animal control program.
- Identification and signage of plantation fire roads to comply with Plantations and Afforestation Code amendments
- Review unstocked area in Cpt 2007 for potential to re establish.

Other Management Issues

Mingary Vale - Illegal access looks to be an ongoing problem on this site.

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Appendix 1.

Macquarie Region Rainfall July 2011 – June 2012.

