



BIG TREE STATE

The Tourism Potential of Tasmania's Forests



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Executive Summary

Tasmania is quickly becoming one of the most popular tourist destinations on the globe. Visitors flock to the state primarily to visit our distinctive natural wonders. However, one of the features that makes Tasmania so unique is largely ignored: its big trees.

Tasmania is home to some of the largest trees in the world. Yet there are very few places where visitors can experience these wonders. South of Hobart, where a large proportion of Tasmania's big trees are found, there are currently no places where tourists can visit these spectacular trees free of charge.

This report proposes eight Big Tree Tourism sites which are located in southern Tasmania, where the majority of the state's big trees are found. These sites have been chosen due to their outstanding quality of trees and are located in the Huon, Styx and Tyenna Valleys.

These eight reserves would cost \$745,000 to establish and would significantly boost visitor numbers to the region. It is estimated that they could draw 139,000 visitors each year. This would generate \$20.2 million for the regional communities and could create 163 jobs.

The reason that Tasmania doesn't utilise its big trees to their full advantage is because it is in direct conflict with native forest logging. For decades forests have been prioritised for resource extraction rather than a sustainable tourism industry. Tourists do not want to see swathes of clearfell, they want to see our stunning native forests.

The importance of native forest logging to the economy has been overstated for a long time. What's more is that the industry costs the taxpayer millions of dollars each year. A sustainable Big Tree Tourism industry could easily be developed and replace this outdated and unpopular industry.

The costs of building these reserves represents a fraction of millions of dollars that the state owned logging agency loses each year. Yet the benefit to the regional communities would be significant, drawing in tens of millions of dollars each year. It would also produce close to as many direct jobs as what's employed in native forest logging in southern Tasmania.

Tasmania has world class forests with some of the largest trees in the whole world. Tourists want to visit these incredible places. As Tasmania becomes a world-leading travel destination, it is time for forests to be protected. An alternative economy exists in sustainable Big Tree Tourism.

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The authors and associated organisations recognise Tasmania's Aboriginal (Palawa) communities as the Traditional Owners and custodians of all Country in Tasmania and we pay our respect to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that this land was never ceded. We support efforts to progress recognition of the distinct rights of Indigenous peoples as well as reconciliation, land justice and equality. We welcome actions that better seek to identify, present, protect and conserve Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Tasmania: Home of Big Trees

Tasmania is home to some of the most spectacular forests on Earth. Its forests contain the tallest flowering plants in the world, which tower over 100 metres in height. Not only are these trees tall, they are also wide, and can grow up to 22 metres in circumference.

The presence of these giant trees in Tasmania's forests make them an awe-inspiring place to visit. With a picturesque understory of lush rainforest and giant tree ferns, visitors often describe these forests as 'magic' and 'unforgettable'.

In terms of an ecotourism destination, many places around the world could not dream up a better experience. Yet in Tasmania, our forests are severely underutilised as a tourist destination, and instead, are prioritised for logging. This has failed to provide the state with economic benefits for decades.

This report outlines a new vision for our forests: One that shows that a new and sustainable economic future for our forests is not only viable, but desirable for the economy and local communities.

The Tourism Industry in Tasmania

Tourism is a major part of Tasmania's economy. The state receives close to one million visitors a year, who spend a total \$2.8 billion dollars annually.¹ The tourism industry provides over 33,600 jobs, which

makes up 13% of the overall Tasmanian workforce,¹ making it one of the biggest industries in the state.

One of the main reasons that visitors come to Tasmania is to experience its nature. Visits to natural places in Tasmania were up 18% in 2022 compared to the previous year.² Tasmania attracts twice the number of nature-based tourists and ecotourists than the Australian average.³ Eco-tourism is big business in Tasmania, and many of the state's tourism campaigns feature nature and wilderness as a drawcard for tourists.


Forests as an Untapped Tourism Resource

In recent years, forests and national parks have become valuable tourism attractions across Australia, due to the downturn in forestry industries and the growth of nature-based tourism.⁴

However, Tasmania appears to be lagging behind other states as it is not yet promoting and utilising its forests as a tourist destination. This is surprising considering that Tasmania is home to some of the tallest trees in the world, plus it has the largest expanse of temperate forests in all of Australia.

Not just tourists, nature is important for Tasmanians

Tasmanians spend around \$334 million each year on nature-based outdoor activities in their home state. This supports around 3,100 jobs. Many nature-based outdoor activities support regional economies by shifting expenditure from urban to regional towns and rural areas. This outdoor activity is beneficial for Tasmanians health, contributing around \$28m in avoided healthcare costs.⁵



“An extra 200,000 people came to Tasmania (in 2022)... many of them coming here primarily to visit our parks and reserves. (These increases) shows that the world wants what we've got here”

**– Roger Jaensch
Minister for Parks**



The Big Tree State:

A New Brand for Tasmania's Forests

Tasmania is home to the largest flowering plants in the whole world. Eucalyptus regnans, known as the Swamp Gum or Mountain Ash, can grow to over 100m tall. This impressive species also grows in Victoria, but the largest and oldest specimens are found in southern Tasmania. Tasmania is also home to another four species of giant eucalypt, all which can grow over 85m tall.

These trees are a sight to behold. Not only are these trees tall, but they can reach incredible widths. In Tasmania, these trees can grow up to 22 metres in circumference. You would need around 13 people holding hands to enclose a tree that size. Few trees on Earth grow to this scale.

People are drawn to giant trees. Around the world they are significant visitor attractions and are a natural pilgrimage site. Yet Tasmania is not utilising our giant trees to their full potential.

There are currently very few places where visitors can experience healthy giant trees. There are only two well known sites in Tasmania where you can experience a stand of giant trees - the Tall Tree Walk at Mount Field National Park and the Styx Big Tree Reserve.

The Tahune Airwalk used to be a popular tourist attraction until the forest was badly burnt in the 2019 bushfires. The

Evercreech Forest Reserve on the east coast used to be a popular site, however three out of the four giant white gums have recently died. Historically, Tasmania used to have many big tree tourism sites but they have fallen into disrepair.

Tourist infrastructure based around Tasmania's big trees is lacking and there are huge opportunities to develop visitor experiences which will bring money and jobs to regional communities. For instance, there are currently no free, sign-posted places to visit big trees south of Hobart - a region where a large proportion of Tasmania's big trees can be found.

Big Tree Tourism fits perfectly into the "Southern Tasmania Destination Management Plan 2022-2025" which advocates for accessible natural wilderness. The plan specifically mentions showcasing and developing the Tall Tree Experience as one of their catalyst projects.⁶

Big Tree Tourism also aligns with the recent Tasmanian Government report titled 'Tasmania's 2030 Visitor Economy'.⁷ This report focuses on increasing the length of visitor stays, rather than increasing overall numbers. Big Tree Tourism fits well with this goal as it is adding on experiences to existing tourism areas.

Californian redwoods

The USA is home to the Californian Redwood, which is the tallest tree species on earth. Big Tree Tourism is a huge industry in California and provides many benefits to regional communities. The Redwood National Park attracts around half a million visitors each year. This generates AUD\$53 million for the regional economies and provides over 400 jobs to the local communities.⁸

The Big Tree Vision

There is huge potential for Tasmania to capitalise on its Big Trees and they could become a significant drawcard for tourists from interstate and internationally. Given the right investment we could have a Big Tree Tourism industry that rivals the Giant Redwoods in California, USA.

An important element of these proposed Big Tree Tourism sites is to provide a experiential tourism encounter, where visitors can reflect and learn about these unique forests. This will be achieved by detailed interpretive signs throughout the walks as well as through to the creation of a Big Tree phone application where visitors can learn more about these important environments.

The Huon Valley

The Huon Valley represents a significant area known as the Southern Forests, which contains some of the largest trees in Tasmania. The Huon Valley already hosts a well developed tourism brand with many tourist sites in the region. There are three potential big tree tourism sites in the Huon Valley that could become key tourism sites:

Grove of Giants

The Grove of Giants is one of the most remarkable stands of old growth forest on Earth. The 100 ha patch of forest is home to 150 trees over four metres in diameter, making it the most significant site for giant flowering trees in the world. It is home the world's biggest blue gum (by volume) and the tallest blue gum in the world. This remarkable patch of forest already has a 1.2km informal walking track established which is currently being maintained by community groups.

Hopetoun Grove

This beautiful patch of forest has some outstanding trees. The grove is one of the few areas in the southern forests not to be affected by the 2019 bushfires. This area represents an easy walk where giant trees can be viewed. It is also in close proximity to the tourist town of Dover, making it an ideal location.

Shield Maiden

Shield Maiden is one of Tasmania's most impressive trees. It is one of the largest by volume and towers over 86 metres tall. It is located in a scenic rainforest gully and was one of the few well-known giant trees in the region to avoid the 2019 fires. This tree is one of the best looking trees in Tasmania and is part of the now-abandoned Arve Forest Loop scenic drive just near the Hartz Mountains National Park.

The Styx and Tyenna Valleys

The Styx Valley is one of the few places in Tasmania where visitors have easy access to free Big Tree Tourist sites. These include the Tall Trees walk at Mount Field National Park and the Styx Big Tree walk and the Twisted Sister. However, there are lots of additional sites of spectacular forests which could be easily added to boost visitor experience.

Tolkien Track

The Tolkien Track already contains an informal walking track that has been established for close to 20 years. It contains arguably the best example of ancient Eucalyptus regnans growing above a beautiful rainforest understory. The track leads to the world-famous Gandalf's Staff, as well as notable trees such as Fangorn and the Cave Tree.

Andromeda Stand

The Andromeda Stand is home to the second tallest tree in Tasmania, 'Icarus Dream', which stands at 97m tall. This stand of trees is the tallest in the southern hemisphere with ten trees exceeding 90m in height. The Andromeda Stand used to be a tourist site in the 1960's but unfortunately the infrastructure was neglected and left to rot.

Carbon Circuit

The Carbon Circuit is another informal walking track that was established by grassroots organisations. The forest contains many giant trees and a spectacular and scenic rainforest understory. There is already a 1 km circuit walk established in site which weaves through some of the largest trees.

Lady Binney

The Lady Binney Forest Reserve is an accessible grove of large and unique Stringybark trees. An established walking track of 750 m exists in the area that has not been maintained over the last decade. The site is incredibly scenic, with a beautiful open understory and represents an easy walk close to the township of Maydena.

Home Tree

Home Tree is a short distance from Lady Binney, and is one of the widest stringybark trees ever recorded. A short informal walking track already leads to the tree, winding its way through a beautiful rainforest understory dense with Leatherwood trees.

Tasmania: Home of Big Trees

Only a small investment would be needed to construct these eight Big Tree Tourism developments, and it could provide massive benefits to regional communities.

The estimated infrastructure cost is around \$745,000 for construction, however, additional funding would be needed for on going maintenance. It is estimated that these eight

reserves could potentially draw in 139,000 visitor days per year. This could provide around \$20.2 million to regional communities and could provide around 162 indirect jobs.

These low-cost tourism developments could help put Tasmania on the world map as a Big Tree Tourism location.

Site	Cost	Quality*	No of Visitors
Huon Valley			
Grove of Giants	\$189,000	★★★★★	30,000
Shield Maiden	\$28,000	★★★★	30,000
Hopetoun Grove	\$85,000	★★★★★	25,000
Styx Valley			
Tolkien Track	\$70,000	★★★★★	30,000
Andromeda Stand	\$82,000	★★★★	30,000
Carbon Circuit	\$89,000	★★★★	30,000
Tyenna Valley			
Lady Binney	\$41,000	★★★★★	35,000
Home Tree	\$30,000	★★★★	35,000
App development	\$30,000	-	-
Promotion costs	\$100,000	-	-
Total	\$744,600	-	-
Site	Estimated Visitors**	Contribution to Economy	Indirect Jobs Generated
Huon Valley	56,000	\$9.1 m	73
Styx/Tyenna Valley	83,000	\$11.1 m	89
Total	139,000	\$20.2 m	162

* This is based on the quality of the trees, proximity to towns and other tourist attractions, as well as accessibility.
 **These figures are combined number of visitors, assuming that tourists would visit more than one site per trip.



Not Just Big Trees

Tasmania's forests have many other reasons to visit besides giant trees. There are many examples of large expanses of old-growth forests which provide enhanced visitor experience. There are many opportunities that Tasmania could expand on to encourage more forest-based tourism. These include multi-day walks, mountain biking, cycle touring, horse-riding, rafting and kayaking, recreational tree climbing, wellness retreats and wildlife watching.

Regenerative Tourism

There is a growing popularity with the concept of 'Regenerative Tourism', where visitors have the opportunity to create positive impact during their stay. There is many opportunities where visitors can participate in helping to restore and protect Tasmania's unique forests. This could include many forest-based activities, such as bush regeneration, tree planting and the creation and maintenance of forest trails.

The Mountain Biking Boom

Mountain biking has experienced a huge increase in popularity. An additional 180,000 people participated in mountain biking in Australia over the last two years.⁷ Tasmania has benefited heavily from the establishment of two world-class mountain bike parks, which have revitalised old logging communities into vibrant places with lots of opportunities for employment.

Blue Derby

Blue Derby mountain bike park in the northern Tasmanian town of Derby is often used as an example of how a mountain bike park can transform a regional town. Derby was on the "brink of collapse"⁹ following a downturn in the forestry and mining industries, but in 2015 a mountain bike park was created via a \$31 million investment from the State Government. The town now attracts 30,000 visitors a year which contributes \$30 million dollars into the local community annually.⁷

Maydena

The Maydena Bike Park was opened in 2018 and is a world-class track network with over 100km of mountain bike trails. The Park is the only place in the world where a full-scale, gravity-focused bike park is situated within in temperate rainforest. As a result, it draws tourists from around Australia and the world, and has over 25,000 rider days a year.¹⁰ The Maydena Bike Park contributes significantly to the local economy, and injected \$26.4m to the economy in 2022.

Takayna /Tarkine

The Tarkine is home to one of the largest remaining temperate rainforests in the Southern Hemisphere. Its forests are extremely picturesque, with large old trees and mossy understory. Its ancient forests provide a unique tourist drawcard and provide an excellent location for a great variety of nature-based activities. The Tarkine contains Tasmania's highest density of wild rivers, extensive cave systems and many existing walking tracks. The area has been identified as having potential to deliver a significant annual tourism contribution and create new jobs for the North West.¹¹



Native Forest Logging

Tasmania has some of the tallest and most impressive trees on the planet, but we are not utilising this significant natural resource to its full advantage. Why is this?

One of the main reasons that Big Tree Tourism has not been fully developed in Tasmania is because it is in direct conflict with the native forest logging industry. For decades, the Tasmanian Government has given priority to the native forest logging industry over all other economic sectors in the state. The importance of native forest logging to Tasmania's economy has long been over inflated by politicians and for

Logging in Direct Conflict with Tourism

It is clear that there is direct conflict with the tourism industry and native forest logging. Previous studies have suggested that native forest logging has the potential to negatively impact upon visitor perceptions. For example, around 45% of visitors indicated that observing logged areas had a negative effect on their perception of Tasmania as a tourist destination. Close to 80% of visitors wanted to see logging banned from near recreation areas.¹²

In 2022, over 200 tourism and outdoor businesses including Patagonia, Paddy Pallin, Derby Mountain Bike businesses, and Derwent Valley Tourism signed an open letter calling for an end to native forest logging. Shortly after this letter, the Tourism

Ecotourism is a Better Economic Choice

No other industry in Tasmania has received as many government subsidies and handouts as native forest logging. In the 20 years from 1997 to 2017, it is estimated that over \$1 billion in government subsidies and grants was provided to the Tasmanian forestry industry. Over the same period, the state run logging agency, Sustainable Timber Tasmania, lost over \$1.3 billion.¹⁵

This money could have been spent in many other ways that would have benefited regional communities. The development of forest based tourism ventures such as those

decades has been used as a political wedge by both the Labor and Liberal parties to distance themselves from conservationists.

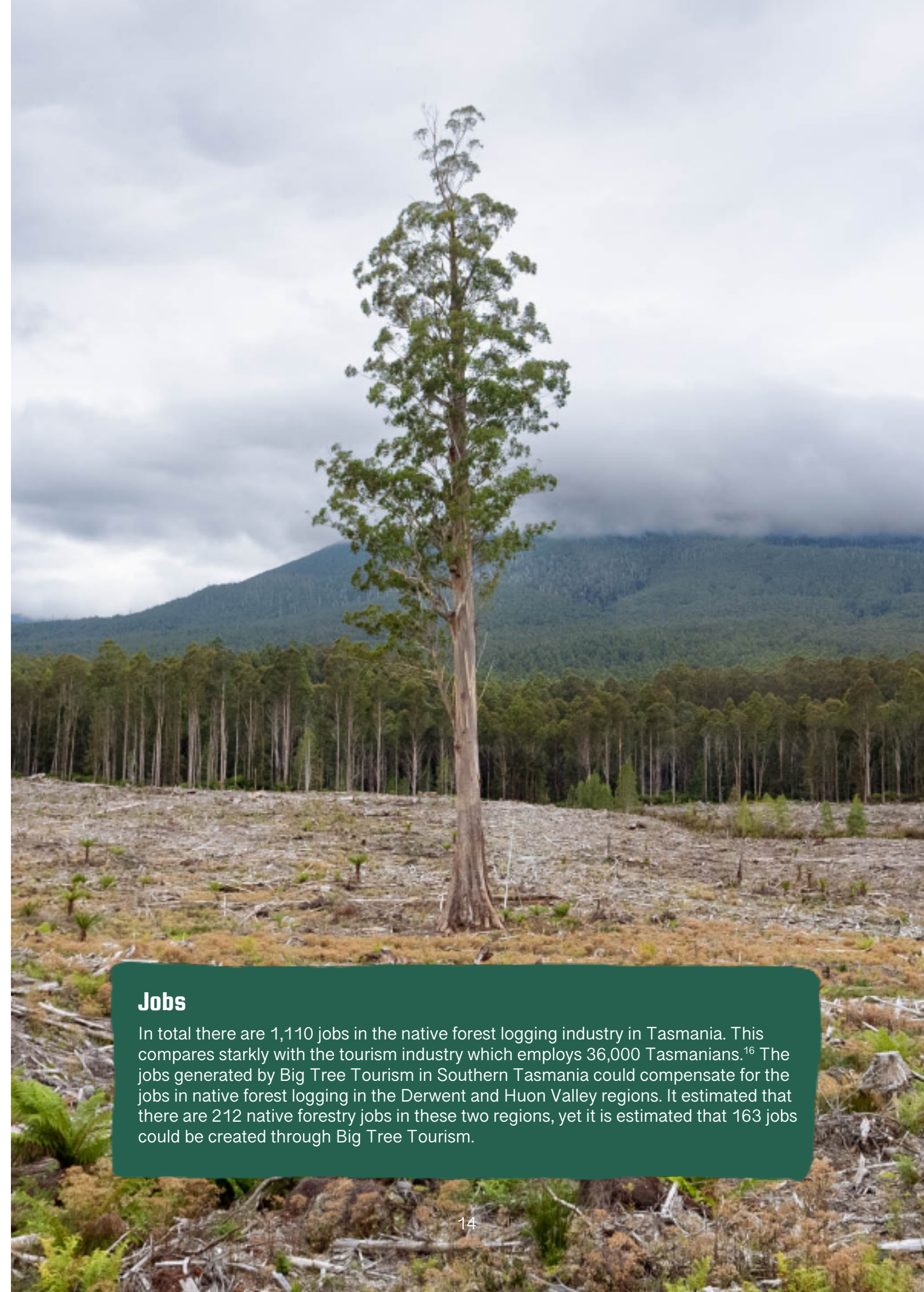
The Tasmanian Government gives preference to native forest logging over a sustainable tourism industry. Many of the Big Tree Tourism sites have fallen into disrepair over the last few decades. One can only assume this is due to the contradiction and likely scrutiny the Tasmanian Government would face by promoting its forests, yet still continuing to log them, especially old-growth and high conservation forests.

Industry Council of Tasmania (TICT) walked away from the Tourism and Forestry Protocol Agreement. Tasmania's tourism lobby group ended this agreement with the forestry industry after mounting concerns from operators that logging is jeopardising the state's "clean and green" image.

Current tensions have also loomed over the logging of forests around the Blue Derby and Maydena Bike Parks, resulting in strong community opposition, which has resulted in a court case. Bike park management and surrounding businesses in both locations have been opposed to logging operations next to these parks.^{13,14} Opponents claim that logging detracts from Tasmania's eco-tourism brand.

discussed in this report would have cost a fraction of the amount that has been spent propping up the forestry industry, and would have created greater income to the regional communities.

The eight Big Tree Tourism sites proposed in this report would cost \$745,000 to construct, which represents a fraction of the millions of dollars that Sustainable Timber Tasmania losses each year. With this investment, it could draw in \$20.2 million to the Huon and Derwent Valley's economies.



Jobs

In total there are 1,110 jobs in the native forest logging industry in Tasmania. This compares starkly with the tourism industry which employs 36,000 Tasmanians.¹⁶ The jobs generated by Big Tree Tourism in Southern Tasmania could compensate for the jobs in native forest logging in the Derwent and Huon Valley regions. It is estimated that there are 212 native forestry jobs in these two regions, yet it is estimated that 163 jobs could be created through Big Tree Tourism.



Conclusion

Tasmania has world class forests with some of the largest trees in the whole world. Tourists want to visit these incredible places. However very few opportunities exist for visitors to experience these unique forests. But with a small investment, Tasmania could establish a thriving Big Tree Tourism sector. Our Big Tree experiences could rival that of the Redwoods in the USA.

The establishment of these eight Big Tree Tourism sites could mean \$20.2 million in benefits to the regional communities of the Huon and Derwent Valleys. It would be a significant value add to existing tourism sites in the areas, creating more income for tourism businesses in the region.

These relatively low-cost tourism developments could help put Tasmania on the world map as a Big Tree Tourism location. They could draw international visitors from around the world. It could also capitalise heavily on the increasing domestic tourism market, with growing interest from mainland visitors in Tasmania's unique wilderness.

Decades of pro-forestry governments has meant that our forests have been valued only for resource extraction. As Tasmania becomes a world-leading travel destination, it is time for it's forests to be protected and emphasis should be placed developing a sustainable forest tourism industry, starting with the Big Tree Tourism plan.

Next steps

- Create a Big Tree Tourism Plan between the Tasmanian Government and other stakeholders, including tourism and environmental groups.
- Undertake a full scale feasibility study to ensure accurate costings and the suitability of each site.
- Undertake consultation with the wider communities, Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginals), tourism business and relevant stakeholders.

Risks to Tourism

The 2019 bushfires destroyed many large trees in the southern forests of Tasmania, including two existing Big Tree Tourism sites. Climate change and the ever building threat that increased bushfires will have on Big Tree Tourism facilities is a significant concern. However, these are the same threats that will impact all of Tasmania's nature-based tourism sector.

Both state and federal governments need to take serious and swift action to addressing greenhouse gas emissions, which is the only way to reduce these threats to the tourism economy. Governments need to invest heavily in fire-fighting equipment and undertake rigorous planning to protect Tasmania's natural assets and the economies that rely on them.

Appendix

Estimating the economic benefits of Big Tree Tourism sites to the local economy

The potential visitor numbers to each site have been estimated in the table on page 10. This is based on estimations of visitor numbers to the Tahune Airwalk, which at its peak before the bushfires in 2019 got up to 150,000 visitors per year. We estimate that these Big Tree Tourism sites would receive around a third of those numbers, due to more modest infrastructure and the lack of a paved road on some locations.

Advertising and promotion would be needed to ensure that visitors know about these new attractions. Visitors to each of these locations (Huon, Styx and Tyenna) have been adjusted assuming that visitors may visit more than one site per day.

Costings for Big Tree tourist infrastructure

The purpose of this report is not to give a full detailed costings and plans of the suggested Big Tree Tourism sites, but to give policy makers and the general public a rough estimate of the costs involved. The estimated costs were generated with the most accurate information available, but full project scope would need to be undertaken in order to gain a full understanding of the costs involved.

Site assessments were done to measure walking track distances and to assess the condition on access roads. Cost estimates for tracks were \$60 per metre for the establishment of new tracks, \$40 per metre for the upgrade of existing informal tracks \$5 per metre for the refurbishment of existing formal tracks.

The Huon Valley

Centurion, the world's tallest flowering plant, has not been chosen for a tourism site. This tree sustained significant damage during the 2019 bushfires and is rapidly declining in health.

Grove of Giants

An established informal track already exists which is 1.2km and goes from the entrance to Lathamus Keep. The surface of the walking would need to be upgraded and signs would need to be installed. The access road would need grading and resurfacing in some locations, as well as the establishment of a parking area.

Costs:

Walking track: 1200m @ \$40 per m: \$48,000
Road upgrade: \$100,000
Parking area: \$10,000
Toilets: \$25,000
Signs: \$6,000
TOTAL: \$189,000

Hopetoun Grove

No walking track exists here so a new one would need to be established.

The benefit to the local economy was estimated from Local Government Area Profiles from Tourism Research Australia, which estimates the average spend per trip for visitors (including international, intra- and interstate) is \$163 for the Huon Valley and \$133 for the Florentine and Styx (Derwent Valley).

IO Analysis was used to model the effect of increased spending on the number of indirect jobs created. This was based on regional IO tables in the Economic Impact Analysis Tool (EIAT) developed by the Australian Workplace Innovation and Social Research Centre (WISer). From this analysis it is assumed that one indirect job is created for every \$125,000 of additional spending.

Costs:

Walking track: 500m @ \$60 per metre plus viewing platform (\$2,000) = \$32,000
Road upgrade: \$20,000
Toilet block: \$25,000
Parking area: \$5,000
Signs: \$3,000
TOTAL: \$60,000

Shield Maiden

This tree is on a side road which is just off the Arve Road. The road is in very good condition and the tree is only 100m from the road so little infrastructure is needed.

Costs:

Walking track: 100m @ \$60 per metre plus viewing platform (\$4,000) = \$10,000
Road upgrade: \$5,000
Parking area: \$10,000
Signs: \$3,000
TOTAL: \$28,000

The Styx/Tyenna Valley

Andromeda Stand

This site used to have tourist infrastructure in the 1960's but the majority of this would need to be replaced. A small walking track would need to be constructed, along with minor upgrades to the road.

Costs:

Walking track: 450m @ \$40 per metre, plus viewing platform (\$3,000) = \$21,000
Road upgrade: \$20,000
Parking Area: \$10,000
Toilets: \$25,000
Signs: \$6,000
TOTAL: \$82,000

Tolkien Track

The Tolkien Track already has an established walking track that would need to be upgraded and resurfaced. The road to the site is good quality and the existing parking area would only need minor improvements

Costs:

Walking track: 750m @ \$40 per metre plus viewing platform (\$2,000) = \$32,000
Road upgrade: \$2,000
Parking area: \$10,000
Toilets: \$25,000
Signs: \$6,000
TOTAL: \$70,000

Carbon Circuit

The Carbon Circuit has an existing walking track that is xx long, however it would need upgrading and resurfacing. The road is already good quality and a small parking area exists that would only need minor upgrades.

Costs:

Walking track: 1km @ \$40 per metre plus viewing platforms (\$3,000) = \$43,000
Road upgrade: \$10,000
Parking area: \$5,000
Toilets: \$25,000
Signs: \$6,000
TOTAL: \$ 89,000

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