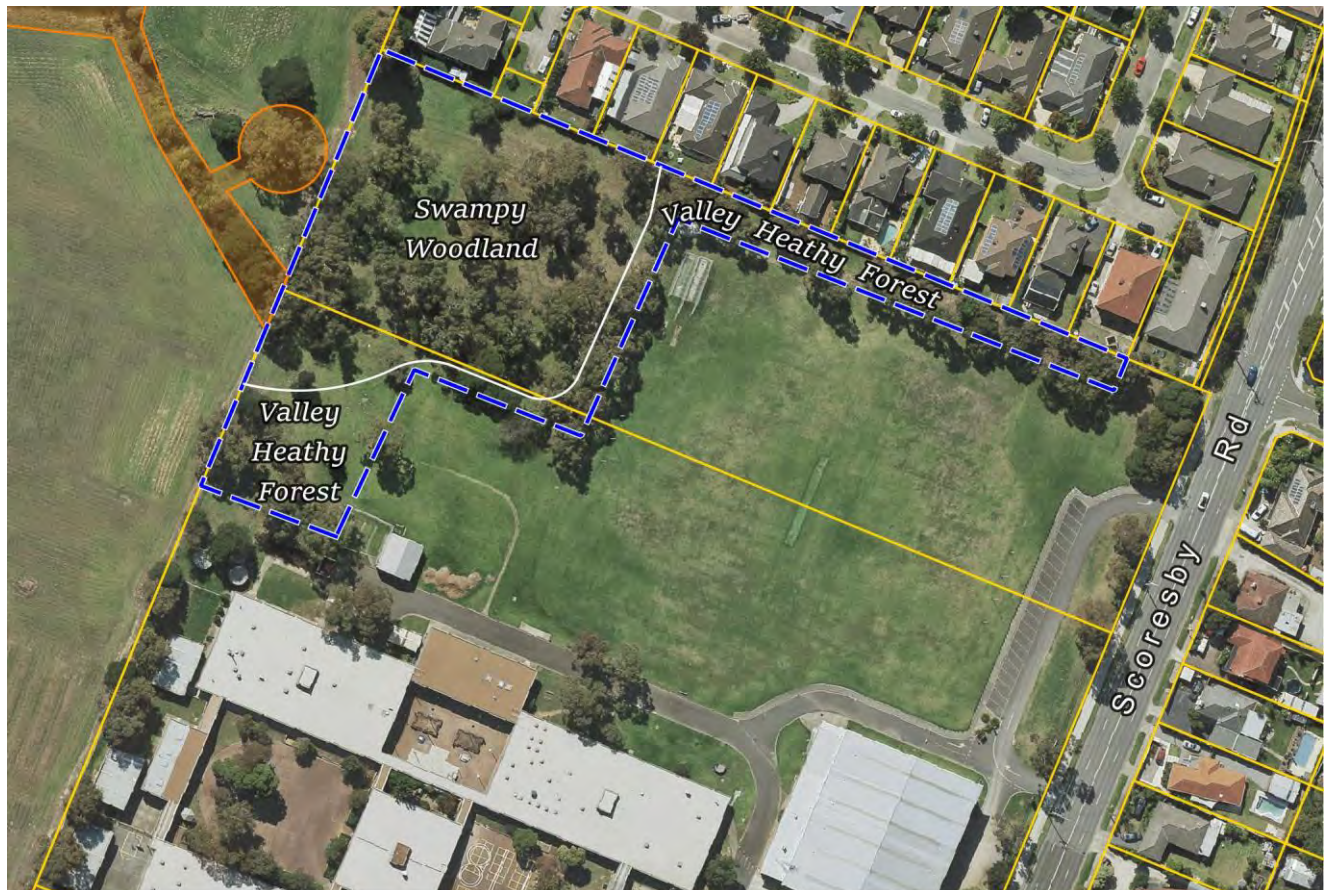


Site 109. Fairhills High School, Knoxfield

Part of the grounds of a high school with remnant tree cover.

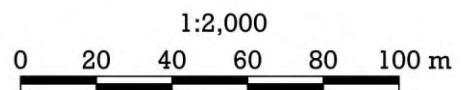
Summary of significant feature:

- Locally significant: approximately fifty Mealy Stringybarks and twenty-five Swamp Gums, both species being locally threatened.



Legend

- Site 109
- Site 33
- Properties



Boundaries

The site is the part of the schoolgrounds outlined with blue dashes above – unchanged from previous editions of this report. The area is 0.98 ha.

Land use & tenure: High school grounds.

Site description

The treed, northwestern corner of the schoolgrounds is on a drainage line and is prone to waterlogging. It is labelled above as Swampy Woodland, which is the regionally-endangered vegetation type whose vestiges remain there. Its remnant trees comprise approximately twenty-five Swamp Gums (*Eucalyptus ovata*), eight Mealy Stringybarks (*Eucalyptus cephalocarpa*), two Narrow-leaved Peppermints (*Eucalyptus radiata*), two Blackwoods (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and three Swamp Paperbarks (*Melaleuca ericifolia*). One of the Swamp Gums is very large and represents good habitat for a variety of native birds, possums, bats and insects. The remaining trees in this area are reproductively mature and represent reasonable habitat for native birds and invertebrates.

There are no remnant shrubs in the Swampy Woodland and the only remnant groundcover plants are two or three Spiny-headed Mat-rushes (*Lomandra longifolia* subsp. *longifolia* – perhaps planted) and many of the ubiquitous Clustered Wallaby-grass (*Rytidosperma racemosum*) and Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*).

The remaining treed parts of the site are vestiges of the regionally-endangered vegetation type, Valley Heathy Forest. The canopy comprises fifty or so Mealy Stringybarks, seven Narrow-leaved Peppermints and one Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*). There are also many Black Wattles (*Acacia mearnsii*). Although these trees are fairly large, they are mostly growing on earth that was excavated decades ago for the playing field, so at least some of them may have been planted last century. As in the Swampy Woodland, remnant shrubs are absent and indigenous groundcover plants are limited to common native grasses – in this case, Clustered Wallaby-grass and Slender Wallaby-grass (*Rytidosperma penicillatum*).

A 1946 aerial photograph shows that at the time, the only trees on the land were in a narrow band along the drainage line.

The tree canopy's condition has not deteriorated much since the author first inspected the site in 2004 but a significant fraction of the understorey species have died out since 2009. Spiny-headed Mat-rush was abundant in 2009 but it is now represented by only two individuals, despite the hardy nature of the species.

Relationship to other land

The school is less than seventy metres southeast from the large dam at the former Knoxfield Institute for Horticultural Development. That dam is part of the Blind Creek habitat corridor (Site 33) and it is planned to be replaced by a new artificial wetland that overlaps with it. The forest habitat along the corridor is 100 m further away. Some birds, bats, tree frogs and flying insects no doubt cross this distance to make use of the school's forest, but the school could not be regarded as an ecological stepping-stone or a link in a corridor.

Bioregion: Gippsland Plain

Habitat types

Valley Heathy Forest (EVC 127, **regionally Endangered**)

Swampy Woodland (EVC 937, **regionally Endangered**)

Flora and fauna of special significance

None detected.

Fauna habitat features

The remnant trees, combined with mature planted trees, represent basic habitat for native forest birds, bats, possums, tree frogs and invertebrates. The particularly large Swamp Gum has hollows that are likely to be inhabited by birds or bats.

Significance rating

The following is an assessment of the site's biological significance against the Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Action's standard criteria (Amos 2004).

Threatened Ecological Vegetation Classes

Both of the original EVCs on the site are now regionally endangered. However, the site's paucity of understorey means that none of the vegetation qualifies as a 'remnant patch' of either EVC for the purposes of the standard criteria (and specifically, criterion 3.2.3). Consequently, the regionally-endangered status of the EVCs is not recognised as significant under the standard criteria.

Locally-threatened plant species

The site contains approximately fifty Mealy Stringybarks and twenty-five Swamp Gums, both species being locally threatened. The presence of so many individuals of locally-threatened species meets criterion 3.1.5 for a site of **Local** significance.

Threats

- Human-induced climate change, which is predicted to cause more severe droughts, heatwaves and storms, as well as substantially lower rainfall (particularly in winter);
- Debilitation and deaths of trees due to the effects of climate change;
- Potential future need for more school buildings, which might involve removal of native vegetation;
- Lack of natural replacement of indigenous species as they die, due to mowing and trampling.

Strategic planning

Schedule 4 of the Vegetation Protection Overlay (VPO4) applies to this site as a result of a recommendation in the previous (2010) edition of this report. The site's understorey has since deteriorated significantly but VPO4 only addresses canopy trees, which remain generally healthy and have improved in habitat value because they are 15 years older. There is therefore no apparent reason to amend the application of VPO4 to this site.

Information sources used in this assessment

- A botanical survey by Dr Lorimer for 20 minutes on 12th April 2004 for the first edition of this report, including:
 - Compilation of a list of indigenous and introduced plants;
 - A description of the vegetation's structural and floristic composition;
 - Incidental fauna observations; and
 - Checks for fauna habitat, ecological threats and management issues;
- A follow-up botanical survey by Dr Lorimer on 24th March 2009 for the second edition of this report;
- Another botanical survey by Dr Lorimer on 19th January 2025 for this edition;
- A search in vain for records of flora and fauna observations stored in Knox City Council's biodiversity database or in the Atlas of Living Australia;
- Aerial and satellite imagery from between 1976 and 2025;
- The Victorian Government's 'NatureKit' website;
- Maps of geology, topography and strategic planning information produced by agencies of the Victorian Government.