

Falls Creek Community Rabbit Information

Have you noticed more rabbits hopping in our village over the past year?






The recent La Nina weather influence has delivered consistent rainfall providing favourable conditions for rabbits, particularly in the Village area where there is abundant highly palatable non-native grass. Rabbits have been taking refuge under buildings causing damage in the Village and has been impacting on our native flora and fauna and overall public amenity. This is a community problem and will rely on everyone's help to bring about successful rabbit control in the Resort.

A Rabbit Action Plan for our unique Resort

The presence of the European Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) in our resort is a potential threat to the resort's biodiversity values and recreational amenity. To respond to the increased number of rabbits being detected in the resort during the previous summer season, Falls Creek Reso sought the help from an expert to develop a Rabbit Action Plan for rabbits within Falls Creek Resort that addressed some of our unique situation including the lack of barriers between properties, the presence of domestic dogs, high visitation, and high biodiversity values. The plan provides clear direction with staged phases for the control works required in the short term and as an ongoing effort to control and protect assets.

To be successful in controlling rabbits within the resort, it is crucial to understand rabbit biology at high elevations. The European rabbit was documented to have expanded its range to 1500m (winter snowline) at or about 1910, and by the 1970s there were colonising rabbit populations known to within alpine areas (1850m) that had since become permanent at or about 2010. This colonisation occurred due to changing climate and being aided by people modifying native habitat and the construction of infrastructure which provided year-round shelter (Green et al. 2016).

Rabbits within Falls Creek Resort have become well established within the village creating issues including:

-  reduced survival of native plant species, providing a food source for breeding rabbits and helping to support foxes and feral cat populations
-  impacting infrastructure (buildings/services/roads)
-  contributing to weed invasion by exposing bare soil and carrying weed seed to new locations
-  erosion
-  reducing public amenity

Rabbit control in the unique landscape of Falls Creek requires adaptation of best practice control methods to ensure the native environment and infrastructure is protected. For this reason, the focus of the Rabbit Action Plan is centred around stopping breeding by **preventing access to burrows**.

The premise for this rationale is to limit the key resource of burrows that are essential for rabbits in all climatic zones especially in alpine areas. This is based on rabbit control research done in arid areas (Berman et al. 2001) that demonstrated the effectiveness of focussing on limiting access to the key resource of burrows exposing rabbits to climate extremes, predation and greatly lessening the opportunity of successful breeding. The Rabbit Action Plan hinges on the knowledge that rabbits have only been able to colonise and then establish in alpine areas since the building of structures that provide cover for rabbits to dig burrows.

The rabbit population within Falls Creek Alpine Resort's boundary is largely dependent on successful breeding within the village (CDZ1). The Falls Creek Rabbit Action Plan has been designed with these risks and considerations in mind to reduce the opportunity of successful breeding by limiting rabbit access to burrows and/or removing burrows. Implementation of the Action Plan is a phased approach from May 2022 to December 2024 with the overall goal of achieving monitoring outcomes of zero burrows per ha, a score of 0-1 Rapid Rabbit Assessment Guide dung count, and 0.1-0.5 rabbits per spotlight kilometre. Overall, there are 6 main phases (with some sub-phases) that will be progressed to reach the goal.



What you can do

This spring, FCRM will compile a database of all known rabbit burrows, sheltering places and grazing areas to inform the ongoing control works. It will be especially important to understand where rabbits are impacting infrastructures such as burrows under buildings.

You can report burrow locations and sheltering places on your site or anywhere that you see it occurring within the village. Report to the database by using the online form <https://forms.office.com/r/UuajYaJfxs>

To be successful, control methods will need to occur across the entire Village. In the early phases FCRM is seeking Expressions of Interest from leaseholders that would like to be part of the pilot program installing exclusion fencing around the base of any buildings with potential rabbit sheltering places. Complete this EOI <https://forms.office.com/r/GGLRfF0y9j>

Whilst the management of pest animals within leased areas is the responsibility of leaseholders, FCRM considers that rabbits present a significant risk to the ecological values of the resort and therefore FCRM will access leasehold areas in a bid to control them. Where any rabbits occur within your lease area, FCRM may access, monitor, and control them on your behalf. If you would prefer to manage rabbits yourself or would like more information about managing these in your lease area, please email FCRM at landmanagement@falls creek.com.au